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LIFE OF SAINT MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE

Life of
Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque
of the
Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary

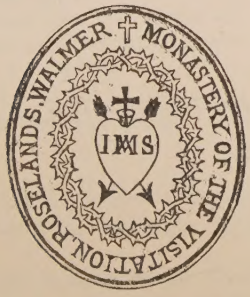
Published in French by the Monastery of the Visitation
of Paray-le-Monial

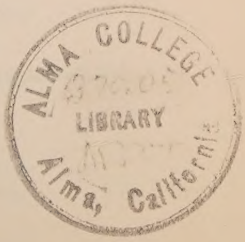
Translated into English by the Sisters of the Visitation,
of Roselands, Walmer, Kent

2ND EDITION

With a preface by
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE

1927





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LETTER OF APPROBATION OF HIS LORDSHIP MGR. CHASSAGNON, BISHOP OF AUTUN, FOR THE FRENCH EDITION OF 1923.

Bishop's House,
Autun.
July 24th, 1923

Dear Reverend Mother,

The editions of the Life of St. Margaret Mary, written by a Religious of the Monastery of Paray-le-Monial, follow each other with a rapidity which manifests the attraction exerted by the humble Sister of the Visitation and the prestige won for her by her rôle of confidante of the Sacred Heart. Devotion to the Heart of Jesus, which to-day enlightens the Church, penetrating it with piety and grace, stimulating it in the pursuit of perfection, awakens also in us the desire of knowing the Saint to whom Our Lord revealed the ineffable secrets of His goodness. At the same time we are urged to study this chosen soul in order to admire its beauty, enjoy its fragrance and sound the depths of its love for God.

We are animated with the desire of knowing the story of this saintly soul, of listening to the account of the radiant apparitions, of learning the origin of the devotion which she taught, of knowing by means of what labours, virtues, sufferings and apostolate, the light which has revealed the Sacred Heart of Jesus, shone forth from the Monastery of Paray-le-Monial. It is this eagerness which multiplies the editions of the Life of Margaret Mary, ensuring the success which causes you such delight and which we note with pleasure.

In proportion, then, as devotion to the Sacred Heart develops, and as it sheds its light over the world, the glory of our Saint also increases. Her revered name is in all hearts and on all lips. She was the joyful, persevering and zealous apostle of the Sacred Heart. But in Its turn, the Sacred Heart takes care to exalt Its faithful servant, and to procure for her ever increasing glory among the Saints of the Church. Shown thus to the world, crowned with the aureola of sanctity, and attracting the attention of all, Margaret Mary teaches us with greater force and authority, how to practise devotion to the Sacred Heart, how to make Divine Love the centre of our being, the law of our life and the motive of our holiness.

None can doubt her art and persuasiveness in fulfilling this rôle. But the Life you are publishing, which has already attained so wide a circulation, will bring out in bold relief the method by which one becomes a disciple of the Sacred Heart. On reading these pages containing the account of the virtues of our Saint, souls will be guided, strengthened, stimulated, and the number of those who, for the love of God and with the help of His grace, keep the Divine Law in all its fulness will become greater.

May your book, therefore, continue to have a very wide and beneficial circulation! I beg the Sacred Heart to bless you, Reverend Mother, and to bless your dear Community.

✠ HYACINTHE,

Bishop of Autun, Chalon and Mâcon

LETTERS OF APPROBATION FOR PRECEDING FRENCH EDITIONS

LETTER OF MGR. GAUTHEY, BISHOP OF NEVERS,

to the Authoress of the "Life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, published by the Sisters of Paray-le-Monial."

NEVERS,
June 18th, 1909.

MY DEAR SISTER,

I have read your MS. twice with great attention, and after the second perusal the impression made by the former was confirmed, namely that you have written a true life of Margaret Mary. Yes, her true life, written in the very place in which she lived, and by the hand of one who for thirty years has studied the pages of both original and contemporary documents with a spirit deeply impregnated with Salesian traditions, together with the observances, customs and manner of thinking, speaking and acting of the Visitation.

However great may have been the talent, ability or piety of other writers, they could never possess what may be termed, vulgarly speaking, "the Visitation intellect;" and this is what is wanting in all other Biographies and Histories of your saintly Sister. One must have spent one's life at the Visitation, nay, at the Visitation of Paray, to be able to comprehend many details which are unintelligible to outsiders. One must have been subjected to the formation of the novitiate, and initiated to all the trials of the religious life, in order to understand the conduct of her Superiors towards

Margaret Mary, and her manner of acting both towards them and her companions. There are certain shades and signs which throw light on many little details, and enhance the value of words and gestures. All this is to be found in your pages with that precision, justice and truth which charms. In a word it is so simple and so real that it exercises an irresistible attraction. Besides being scrupulously exact, you have been most true to history in the relation of every detail of the monastic life of the disciple of the Sacred Heart. The authority of the narrative is thereby singularly enhanced. . . . . You let your Sister speak for herself, and when you speak, it is with her thoughts and in the style of her contemporaries; a most delicate work, which has been wonderfully well executed, and which can be fully estimated by those only who have gone through the writings, memoirs and documents relating to her Cause. I am convinced that the Institute of the Visitation will receive this "Life" with joy and delight. Souls consecrated to God, as well as those who are leading a Christian life in the world, will take pleasure in reading it. In the lessons of your Blessed Sister, you place before them not only the true doctrine of the religious life, but also Christian holiness, which consists above all, both for one and the other, in humility, self-abnegation and sacrifice. It is certain that the Sacred Heart is full of ineffable sweetness but only for souls of energy and sacrifice. You have manifested all the divine exigencies of a love of predilection, together with the extreme delicacy of the fidelity which it requires, and the horror of a soul, striving for conformity to the divine model, for the slightest stain, be it merely a grain of dust, in the presence of the divine sanctity.

This is good wheaten bread of which strong constitutions are formed. Happy they, who in these days of self-seeking and sensuality, have a relish for such viands.

Your Margaret Mary had the "charge of drawing

souls to the Sacred Heart." The Visitation has received the mission of making It known and loved, and of distributing to others the " precious money " of this " inexhaustible treasure," whence " the more one takes, the more there remains to take." You will accomplish this by means of your book, and will contribute towards convincing the faithful, and in particular those of our own days, that the Sacred Heart of Jesus " is the source of all good, which It seeks to impart and communicate to others."

The Blessed Sister sought above all things to remain hidden and unknown. Her Divine Master has for a long time granted her petition. Now, however, all seems to announce the near approach of the hour when He will glorify her according to the words of Holy Scripture : " If it is good to keep the secrets of the king, it is glorious to reveal and show forth the works of God."

What a happy day that will be for Paray-le-Monial and especially for your Monastery, on which you will be able publicly to address her whom you have hitherto called " our Blessed Sister " by the name of " our Holy Sister !"

I unite my prayers with yours to hasten the day of her Canonization. And in the meantime I invoke the abundant blessings of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on your Monastery, yourself and your undertaking.

✠ FRANÇOIS LÉON.

Bishop of Nevers.

LETTER OF HIS LORDSHIP, MGR. VILLARD, BISHOP OF AUTUN

BISHOP'S HOUSE,
AUTUN,
July 6th, 1909.

MY DEAR SISTER,

As Bishop of the diocese of the Sacred Heart, I am happy to be called upon to give my approbation to the new "Life of Blessed Margaret Mary" which you offer to the faithful. Mgr. Gauthey, Bishop of Nevers, is better able to appreciate its merit than anyone else, since he has been familiar with the writings of the Servant of God for so many years. His letter describes your work so admirably, that there remains nothing for me to do but to thank you for having undertaken it, and to wish that it may have a wide circulation. Everything that honours Margaret Mary adds to the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her whole life was spent in making It known, and above all loved. Her life in heaven is a continuation of that which she spent in your beloved Monastery of Paray, which is animated by her spirit and filled with the perfume of her virtues. Let your book, therefore, be published, and may it tend to re-kindle the fire of charity in souls; may it also confer upon them a share in the blessing which I now send you with all my heart. Accept, dear Sister, the assurance of my paternal devotedness in Our Lord.

✠ HENRY RAYMOND,
Bishop of Autun, Chalon and Mâcon.

LETTER OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL AMETTE, ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
PARIS.

June 9th, 1914.

DEAR REVEREND MOTHER,

You are about to publish a second edition of the Life of Blessed Margaret Mary, written by a Religious of your Monastery of Paray. I have read this book with as much edification as interest, and I am delighted that it has been so successful. No other reveals so well the soul of this Servant of God, her intimate relations with Our Lord, and the spirit of devotion to the Sacred Heart, whose evangelist and apostle she was. I hope that this book may become more and more widely known to teach souls to increase in the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to honour It more worthily.

I beg Our Lord to bless you—you and your dear Community.

Believe me, Reverend Mother,
Yours devotedly in Christ,

✠ LÉON-ADOLPHE CARD. AMETTE,
Archbishop of Paris.

LETTER OF MGR. BERTHOIN, BISHOP OF AUTUN, TO THE VERY HONOURED MOTHER SUPERIOR OF THE VISITATION OF PARAY-LE-MONIAL

BISHOP'S HOUSE,
AUTUN,
January 7th, 1919.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

On the occasion of the approaching festival of the Canonization of Margaret Mary, you are bringing out a new edition of her life, written by one of your Sisters of Paray-le-Monial, and you ask me for a letter of approbation for this work. I am delighted to be able to tell you of the spiritual good this book has done my soul. I have read and re-read it several times, and always with great edification. I shall sum up my impressions under three headings, which seem to me to be the basis of the life of Margaret Mary, and which are brought out in a remarkable manner :—

1. An extraordinary resemblance between the words and principles of our Saint and the maxims of the Gospel. It is truly a practical rendering of the Divine Master's doctrine. This resemblance is, of course, to be found in all the Saints, since holiness is nothing else than the reproduction of the model of all perfection—Our Lord Jesus Christ. It may be an illusion on my part, but I have nowhere felt this resemblance to the same extent. From the beginning of the life of Mar-

garet Mary to its close, the love of God is inseparable from the love of suffering under every possible form. She is irresistibly drawn to it, and bears it with a truly admirable courage. And this does not proceed from any human teaching. It is due to the direct action of the Holy Spirit, Who imprints in this soul the meaning and practice of the Divine Master's maxim: "If anyone will be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me." Margaret Mary enters on this path from her tenderest infancy and will become more and more faithful to it to the end of her life. By this she seems to lead up to the devotion to the Sacred Heart, such as it will be revealed to her, as she will practise it herself, and as she will teach it to all with whom she will come in contact. This manifests the wonderful wisdom of God, Who thus wills to fashion the instrument He will soon make use of, and, in the life of His confidante and messenger, to give a living model of the devotion which He intends to establish.

2. Another fact to be noticed is that Margaret Mary's extraordinary communications with God not only do not interfere with her religious life and her Rule, but plunge her yet more deeply in them, and make her more than ever faithful to them. Our Lord wishes that all that He teaches and commands His privileged disciple should be submitted to the judgment of her Superiors. She must obey them always and in all things, never swerving from their decision. This life of absolute dependence as regards exterior authority, which God has established by His ordinary Providence, sanctifies her soul, forms her security, and is, at the same time, the most certain pledge of the divine origin of the favours she receives. She works no miracles to prove the reality of the mission confided to her; her life is one long miracle by reason of the constant heroism with which she practises all the virtues of her holy state, and this, again, is a great lesson. Devotion to the Sacred Heart was to be a renewal of Christian life

in the world. Now, Christian life consists essentially in loving God and in sanctifying oneself in the state appointed by Divine Providence, by accomplishing all one's duties, and especially the duties of one's vocation, perfectly, and for the love of God. In this respect, too, Margaret Mary was a perfect model of the devotion of which she had been constituted the apostle.

3. The account of the different apparitions concerning the manifestation of the new devotion is given fully and strikingly. But immediately after we are told in detail all that Margaret Mary had to suffer before she could realise the fulfilment of the mission entrusted to her. She must, first of all, consent to be the victim of expiation for the imperfections of her Sisters. The Monastery of Paray-le-Monial was the cradle whence devotion to the Sacred Heart was to spread throughout the world. It was necessary to remove the dross which tarnished the lustre of its religious life. The detailed narration of what the God of all purity exacted of her shows us that divine love cannot grow and bear fruit in a heart until the latter is purified from all alloy. This purification was a necessary condition, but it was not sufficient. Margaret Mary must earn, by years of suffering, of mortification, of trials of all kinds, the radiant brilliancy which the devotion to the Sacred Heart was to shed forth during the last years of her life. This is a third, equally important, lesson which can be drawn from her life. When we undertake to work for the extension of the reign of the Sacred Heart, it seems to us that all must move rapidly, according to our desires. Scarcely have we set to work, than we would wish to have attained our end. This is not the way of Providence, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. He wishes us to work with fervour and perseverance, but to leave the fruit of our labours to His wisdom and power and to the time He Himself has destined. Success does not depend on us, but on His grace alone. In the meantime we must

sanctify ourselves, suffer and pray that God's cause may prosper. These are the lessons which, for me, are admirably brought out in the life of Margaret Mary, as it is shown in the present work written in your Monastery. Therefore I wish it every success, and bless the author, all the Community, and yourself particularly, my dear Daughter.

Yours very devotedly in the Sacred Heart,

✠ DÉSIRÉ-HYACINTHE,

Bishop of Autun, Chalon and Mâcon.

PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION OF 1923.

LIVE ✠ JESUS!

Since May 13, 1920, the day of her Canonization, the Life of St. Margaret Mary has been widely circulated. This interest does not seem to be likely to wane, since devotion to the disciple of the Sacred Heart increases with devotion to Itself. In fact, everywhere where the seed of devotion to the Sacred Heart springs up and develops, souls are eager to know more of the humble confidante of the God of love and mercy; that soul whom He Himself chose, not only to reveal His Divine Heart to her personally, but also to be Its apostle and evangelist in the bosom of the Catholic Church. Thus it is that the dear Saint of Paray-le-Monial, whose only ambition was to be for ever forgotten and despised by creatures, now sees that, in accordance with the Divine Will, her name is universally invoked, and her intercession sought for as a favour by the great and by the lowly.

Saint Margaret Mary remains indeed the special treasure of her Monastery, of her Order and of France; but, from the very nature of her mission, sanctioned by the supreme authority of the Church, she belongs to the whole world. Is she not charged with the duty of distributing to all mankind the infinite riches of the Heart of her God? What an incomparable dignity! Our Lord said to her one day: "I appoint thee heiress of My Heart and of all Its treasures, for time and for eternity, allowing thee to use them according to thy desire." God has a purpose in using such words.

What He says, He wills and He maintains it. And every day Our Divine Master takes greater delight in granting His favours through Margaret Mary, especially since she has become a canonized Saint. Numerous graces—temporal as well as spiritual—have been obtained through her intercession. It is a consolation to us to publish it, thus echoing the gratitude of all those who have experienced the beneficial help of the Virgin of Paray. In order to bring within the reach of all, a complete, though abridged, life of the servant of God, we are publishing the present little volume, preceding editions having already received so kind a welcome both in the cloister and in the world.

May the Heart of Jesus once again bless these modest pages! They have no other aim than that of bringing to light the Divine operations in the soul of the Saint whose motto was :

" Wholly from God, nothing from myself !
Wholly to God, nothing to myself !
Wholly for God, nothing for myself !"

From our Monastery of Paray-le-Monial.
June 26th, 1923.

God be praised !

PREFACE TO ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF FRENCH EDITION OF 1923.

The canonisation of S. Margaret Mary, and the desire subsequently growing in the Catholic world that the Holy See may be pleased to extend the celebration of her festival to the whole Church, rendered necessary and make welcome a new account of her wonderful life.

In her, as in the case of so many other Saints, we see the power of God made manifest in the weak things of this world. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of our Divine Master, always cherished by a few chosen souls, has since the seventeenth century become the most fruitful source of love, of reparation, of prayer and of close union with God. Associated closely with devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, as it was in the manifestations given to the Saint and must always be, it has led and is ever leading countless souls to love their Master more ardently, to lead lives of self-sacrifice in reparation for the sins of the world, to give themselves more constantly to prayer, and to strive after closer intimacy with Him. This devotion has in reality transformed the devotion of the Catholic Church by opening out to multitudes who had feared to enter them, approaches to Divine Love, the source of all holiness. The feast of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Hour, the first Friday of each month, more frequent Communion, are giving to every class of society opportunities, unrealized in earlier ages, of keeping themselves uncontaminated from the world in even the most sin-laden surroundings, and of rising therein to heights of sanctity. All this has come forth

in God's Providence from the cell of the hidden nun, and from the humble Chapel, of the Monastery of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial.

She was a very humble soul, with striking natural qualities veiled by Divine permission from full appreciation on the part of those in whose midst she passed her days. She yielded herself completely and unresistingly to the Divine will and purpose. By her means God has accomplished a very wonderful work, which will last and grow to the end of time.

The lesson is clear to and for all who will heed it. We have each to do a work for God. It may be very hidden, as was the existence of S. Margaret Mary on this earth. It is unlikely to have a posthumous glory such as was bestowed upon her life's work. But it is God's own work for us. And we shall accomplish it to the extent that we yield ourselves up to the Divine inspiration and guidance which are never refused to those who seek them in humble and trustful prayer. May S. Margaret Mary teach this lesson to all who read the story of her life.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE,
Archbishop of Westminster.

September 4th, 1926.

CHAPTER I

HER BIRTH AND GIRLHOOD. HER EARLY TRIALS AND HER VOCATION.

1647–1671

CLAUDE ALACOQUE, royal notary and judge in the baronial courts of Terreau, Corcheval, and other places, married in 1639 Philiberte Lamyn, and in the designs of God they were destined to be the parents of a daughter who would immortalize their name. Margaret Mary Alacoque was born at Lautecour, a village in the territory of Verosvres, in Charolais, France, on Monday, July 22, 1647, and was baptised on the following Thursday, her godparents being her uncle Antoine Alacoque, curé of the parish, and Margaret de St. Amour, wife of Monsieur de Fautrières, Lord of Corcheval. The Holy Ghost, to Whom all things are present, doubtless took possession of this infant soul with ineffable delight, knowing even then that, far from being driven from the dwelling into which He then entered, He would be free to accomplish in it the marvels of His grace.

This frail infant, scarcely three days old, who had apparently nothing to distinguish her from others of her age, was destined in the plan of Divine Providence to become the instrument by which the great designs of His mercy upon the world were to be accomplished. But before all things God will try the docility of this instrument: He will Himself protect this chosen one, surrounding her with the ramparts of humility, after which He will one day bend down towards her, and will manifest to her His Heart; He will open It to her, with the express command to make It known to His Church, together with all the depth and magnitude of His love. Mysterious light of the Divine Wisdom, which announced thus the brilliancy of an incomparable day, of

which Margaret Mary will be the celestial brightness throughout all time. After having made known to men the Sacred Heart and having plunged herself therein, she will remain charged, as it were, with the office of drawing all to this Divine Heart. Such was to be her special mission. But how will Heaven prepare her for it ? To answer this we must penetrate into the sanctuary of her soul, the key of which Almighty God has left us in the original manuscript of her autobiography, written by the order of her director, Father Rolin, S.J., in the years 1685-86. The handwriting though fine and close is nevertheless clear and characteristic, and this autobiography of 64 pages is one of the most precious treasures of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial. It is from this document that we shall most frequently draw matter for the present work, in order that the disciple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus may personally reveal herself to us.

On reading the autobiography of the Servant of God, whether it be from beginning to end, or only a page here and there at hazard, the reader is struck by the fact that these pages were evidently written without any literary pretensions. All that is human is absent, consequently that which is divine makes itself irresistibly felt. From the first line to the very last, one is struck by its spirit of truth and transparent humility, and forced to conclude that near to Margaret Mary, beside her or rather within her, there is someone whom she is ceaselessly contemplating, who continually inspires her, and with whom alone she is pre-occupied. Why then should she fill her narrative with dates which the reader would fain meet with, but which for herself would add nothing to the greatness of the graces she is relating ? [1]

Obliged by obedience to write, she notes down the

[1] Contemporary documents, however, as well as the traditions of the Monastery, furnish us with many dates, which will be indicated in their proper place.

events as they present themselves to her mind and nothing more. In the first place, turning to her Divine Master, she protests that it is solely out of love for Him that she submits herself to this obedience, and she asks His grace to write nothing except that which will tend to His greater glory and her own abjection. She then continues :—" O my only Love, how much am I indebted to Thee for having prevented me with Thy benedictions from my earliest years by rendering Thyself supreme Master of my heart ! . . . No sooner did I come to know myself than Thou madest my soul to see the hatefulness of sin. This filled me with such a horror of it, that the least blemish was an intolerable torment to me, and checked the outbreaks of my childish vivacity ; it sufficed to tell me that they were displeasing to God : this would stop me at once and withdraw me from what I was desirous of doing." [1]

At the age of four years Margaret was invited by her godmother to stay with her in her " château " at Corcheval, where she was confided to the care of two maids. These two women were of a very different character, one being always amiable and attractive, the other on the contrary harsh and severe. Margaret held aloof from the former but felt instinctively drawn to the latter. Why, we may ask, was this ? It was because He Who enlightens the heart, gave this young child to understand that His grace dwelt in the heart of the latter, whereas it did not reside in that of the former. Faithful in following the interior voice, which urged her to shun the company of the one and to seek that of the other, Margaret always found a means of avoiding the snares laid for her innocence and keeping herself pure beneath the eye of God. And God Himself was watching

[1] Life and Writings of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Edition 1920, Vol II. Autobiography, pp. 29-30. Work published by the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial, after having been completely revised and enlarged by Mgr. Gauthey, Archbishop of Besançon.

that nothing might tarnish the purity of this Flower of the Field, the perfume and beauty of which He wished to reserve exclusively for Himself. To this young child He gave such a desire for holy purity, that, as she herself relates, "without knowing their meaning," she felt herself continually pressed to utter the following words: "O my God, I consecrate to Thee my purity and I make to Thee the vow of perpetual chastity." [1]

She once pronounced them between the two Elevations at Mass. Thus, without positively being able to realise it herself, the divine seal was already affixed to the soul of Margaret. At an age when noise and games constitute the principal happiness of most children, her sole pleasure was to hide herself alone in some wood where she could pray undisturbed, or at other times she would recite the Rosary on her bare knees, kissing the ground and genuflecting at each "Hail Mary!" The first step which Margaret made along the path of sacrifice was to be followed by more than one painful consequence.

She was scarcely eight years old when she lost her father, Claude Alacoque. He was a good Christian and a man of honour, and was held in high esteem by all who knew him. Madame Alacoque, upon whom now devolved the entire care of her five children, and who was overburdened with household affairs, found it impossible to attend as she should, to the education of her daughter, and resolved therefore to place her at school with the Urbanist nuns at Charolles. [2]

Here it was that Margaret made her First Communion when about nine years of age, being already instructed in the divine mysteries by God Himself. After this first sacramental union of her soul with her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Man-God constituted Himself

[1] Autobiography, p. 30.

[2] These Sisters belonged to the Order of Poor Clares, who followed the less severe Rule of Pope Urban IV.

her Master, and the lessons given by Him are very different from those of any earthly master.

Of an amiable and joyous disposition she soon made herself beloved by everyone. Her natural inclinations would have led her to give herself up too much to pleasure; but the Almighty mingled with them so much bitterness that, little by little, her heart became detached from creatures and sought its sole repose in the Creator.

She regarded all her Mistresses as saints, and thinking that sanctity was the natural state of all Religious, she wished to be a nun herself in order to become a saint, and not knowing of any other Community but the one where she then was, it seemed to her, according to her own naïve expression, "that she ought to remain there."[1] But in order to attach Margaret more closely to Himself, Our Lord permitted that a strange illness should awaken in her still more serious reflections. She became so weak and emaciated that at the end of two years her mother withdrew her from the Convent. After her return to her family, she still continued for some time a victim to this inexplicable malady. "For four years I was unable to walk," she says, "my bones pierced my skin in all directions."[2] No remedy could be found that was of any avail, but as soon as the young invalid made a vow to the Blessed Virgin to become one of her daughters if she were cured, every trace of the former illness disappeared. From that moment the Blessed Virgin became the heavenly Mistress of her whom she had restored to health. This good Mother reproached her for her smallest faults. One day when Margaret remained seated whilst saying her Rosary, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her and said: "I am surprised, my daughter, that thou shouldst be so negligent in my service!"[3] Perhaps it was in order to make reparation for this slight act of

[1] Autobiography, p. 31. [2] *Ibid*, p. 31. [3] *Ibid*, p. 31.

negligence in the service of her heavenly Mother, that later on, Margaret made a vow to fast every Saturday in her honour, to recite the little Office of her Immaculate Conception, and to say seven Hail Marys with seven genuflections in honour of her Seven Dolours, every day of her life.[1]

But scarcely was she miraculously restored to health than the world sought to gain her for itself. Without offending God she might legitimately have enjoyed the amusements proper to her age, and it is not without interest that we hear her acknowledge her failings and her temptations in this regard. "I thought only of seeking pleasure in the enjoyment of my liberty, and began to enter into society and to adorn myself in order to please; in a word, I sought to enjoy myself as much as possible."[2] At another time Margaret confesses, in the bitterness of her repentance, that once during the Carnival she had disguised herself with some of her young companions, out of vain complacency for the world. But the Lord Who was jealous of the sanctification of His servant knew well how to place the Cross side by side with the enthusiasm and the dissipation of society. "O my God," she says, "I did not give a thought then to what Thou hast made me know since, that, Thy Sacred Heart having given me birth amidst such sorrows on Calvary, the life which Thou hast given me could be sustained only by the Cross, and that this should be my most delightful food."[3]

Ever since the death of her husband, Madame Alacoque had been deprived of her authority in her own house, where she and her daughter were reduced to a veritable state of servitude. This domestic persecution was incessant and continued for several years, during which Margaret had to submit to a species of martyrdom, of which God alone knew the painful but purifying character.

Three persons, whose names the blessed Servant of

[1] Autobiography, p. 46. [2] *Ibid*, pp. 32-40. [3] *Ibid*, p. 32.

God was careful to conceal, calling them only "the dear benefactresses of my soul," "the true friends of my soul,"[1] never left her a moment's peace, and her every action was subject to their control. Each one oppressed her in a different manner, consequently the subjection was threefold and the humiliations ever new.[2] The frequent illnesses of Madame Alacoque added considerably to the anguish of Margaret, who was deprived of even the most ordinary means of relief. Once in particular, her mother was suffering from so malignant an attack of erysipelas that no one ventured to approach her in order to dress the wound. On the Feast of the Circumcision, during Holy Mass, Margaret begged Our Lord to be Himself the physician and the remedy of her poor mother. On her return home she found that the swelling had opened, leaving a large inflamed wound. Without "any other ointment than that of Divine Providence" she sets to work to dress it, placing all her confidence in the mercy of God, and lo! contrary to all expectations, in a few days the wound was healed. Whence had this young girl, who hitherto could bear neither to see nor to touch a wound, obtained such courage, if not from Him Who strengthened her? "My Divine Master," she says, "consoled and strengthened me by a perfect conformity to His holy will," and acknowledging Him to be the Author of all that happened, she exclaimed: "O my Sovereign Master, if Thou hadst not willed it, this would not have happened, but I return Thee thanks for having permitted it in order to render me more conformable to Thee."[3]

Her most ardent desire was to know how to make

[1] Autobiography, p. 34.

[2] In all probability these persons were her grandmother, aunt and grandaunt on her father's side: i.e., Jeanne Delaroche, widow of Claude Alacoque; Benoîte Alacoque, wife of Toussaint Delaroche, and Benoîte de Meulin, from Chappendye, widow of Simon Delaroche and mother of Toussaint. Cf. Life and Writings, III, p. 538.

[3] Autobiography, p. 37.

meditation, "but," she writes, "I knew nothing of prayer but the name, and the very mention of it ravished my heart with delight. I addressed myself, therefore, to my Sovereign Master, and He taught me how He wished me to make it; and this has served me all my life. He made me prostrate myself humbly before Him, to beg pardon for everything by which I had offended Him. Then after having adored Him, I offered Him my prayer without knowing in what way I should apply myself to it. He then presented Himself to me in the mystery in which He would have me consider Him, and He applied my mind so closely to it, holding my soul and all my powers so absorbed in Himself, that I felt no distraction. My heart was consumed with the desire of loving Him, and this gave me an insatiable desire of Holy Communion and of suffering."[1]

In all her interior desolations, and the conflicts which the world and her love for her mother caused her, Margaret's only resource was to prostrate herself at the feet of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, where she would willingly have remained day and night. In spite of the confusion which she felt whenever she went to the church, the Spirit of God urged her to approach as closely as possible to the tabernacle. Here it was that her Divine Master taught her how to meditate, and discovered to her His mysterious designs over her soul. It was about this time that He imprinted upon her heart so great a love for the poor, that Margaret found her delight in serving and instructing them. She attended them in their illnesses, dressing and kissing their wounds with a supernatural fervour. She gave them everything that she could obtain, and invited the little children to come to her that she might teach them their catechism. They came sometimes in such numbers that they filled a large room, and it frequently happened that both children and mistress were driven

[1] Autobiography, pp. 37-38.

away by one of the three above-named persons, but Margaret was too much accustomed to these contemptuous rebuffs not to receive them with a smile upon her lips. Once when surrounded by her little audience, her brother Chrysostom took her by surprise. "Sister," he said laughingly, "do you intend to become a schoolmistress?" "Pardon me," she answered, "but these poor children are perhaps wholly without instruction."[1]

Our Lord continued to instruct her Himself and manifested to her the beauty of virtue, especially of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, giving her to understand "that by the practice of them one becomes holy." "He said this to me," she continues, "because when praying I always asked Him to make me holy. As I read scarcely anything except the lives of Saints, I used to say on opening them: 'I must find one which is easy to imitate so that I may do likewise, and become a Saint also;' but I was distressed to see that I offended my God so much."[2]

Being in a constant state of indecision, wishing on the one hand to respond to the call of God, and on the other to yield as far as possible to the entreaties of her mother who begged her to remain with her, Margaret thought that she could satisfy her conscience by making an exchange. Our Saviour asked for her heart, but instead of giving it to Him she offered Him her blood, overwhelming herself with austerities, the mere recital of which makes one shudder. By so doing she deceived herself and ruined her health, without succeeding in relieving her interior troubles, for her body was not the victim which her Divine Sacrificer coveted. It was her soul which He wished to possess as a holocaust. The conflict continued and became each day more terrible. On the one hand Our Saviour increased His interior calls and reproaches to such a degree, as even to appear to her under the form of an "Ecce Homo,"

[1] A Life and Writings I, p. 493. Deposition of Chrysostom Iacoque in the Process of 1715. [2] Autobiography, p. 43.

namely in the state in which He was, after His scourging, thereby giving her to understand how much He suffered at seeing His love thus slighted by a creature so beloved as she was, and for whom He had endured such untold torments. On the other hand her natural inclinations and her love for her family became stronger, and claimed their rights with such vehemence that it seemed to her almost impossible for her young heart to resist. Several flattering offers of marriage were made her, and all things seemed to unite together to persuade Margaret that being but a child and not having sufficiently understood what she was about when she made the vow of chastity, she was not in any way bound by it, and that on the contrary it was a duty of filial piety for her to create a home in the world, as this appeared to be the only means of withdrawing her mother from the humiliating servitude under which she laboured.

The history of every vocation supposes a struggle; and even as death, which is the separation of soul and body, is preceded by an agony, so this mystical death, this separation of the soul from the world, is preceded by a moral anguish which in certain souls attains sometimes to the intensity of an agony. Margaret experienced this to its utmost extent.

It so happened that owing to circumstances, entirely independent of her own will, Margaret was not confirmed until the year 1669, she being then twenty-two years of age. She received this Sacrament from the hands of Mgr. Jean de Maupou, Bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône. As Providence does nothing by chance, doubtless God had His designs in this delay. But it is a striking fact that it was at a time when her soul was tossed by storms and persecutions of various kinds, that Margaret was clothed with strength from on high, by a new effusion of the graces of the Holy Spirit of which she would be ever more and more in need.

Our Lord, however, did not leave her entirely without

encouragement. "On one occasion," she writes, "I was, as it were, in an abyss of astonishment that so many faults and imperfections which I perceived in myself did not cause Him to withdraw from me." "It is," He said, "because I wish to make of thee a compound of My love and My mercy." At another time He said to me: "I have chosen thee to be My spouse, and we pledged each other fidelity when thou didst make thy vow of chastity. It was I Who urged thee to make it, before the world had any part in thy heart, because I wished to have it quite pure and unsullied by any earthly affection; and in order to preserve it thus, I removed all malice from thy will so that it should not be corrupted. I then confided thee to the care of My Holy Mother that she might fashion thee according to My designs."[1]

The devil, suspecting that this soul would escape him, tried various other forms of attack. Margaret relates in all humility: "The devil kept ever saying to me: 'Poor wretch, what do you mean by wishing to be a nun, you will become the laughing stock of the world, for you never can persevere, and how ashamed you will be when you put off the religious dress, and leave the Convent! Where will you go to hide yourself?'" She knew not what to decide; nevertheless, far from concealing her anxieties, "in the midst of all this," she says, "I shed bitter tears."[2]

But Our Saviour had compassion on her. He consoled and enlightened her Himself. "He shewed me, one day after Holy Communion, if I am not mistaken, that He was the loveliest, the wealthiest, the most powerful, the most perfect and the most accomplished amongst all lovers, and He reproached me because, after having pledged myself to Him so many years, I could still think of breaking my engagement with Him and entering into any other alliance. "Oh! be assured," He added, "that if thou dost Me this wrong, I

[1] Autobiography, p. 46. [2] *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.

will abandon thee for ever ; but if thou remainest faithful to Me, I will never leave thee, I Myself will be thy strength and thy victory to triumph over thy enemies. I pardon thy ignorance because as yet thou dost not know Me, but if thou art faithful to Me and followest Me, I will teach thee to know Me, and I will manifest Myself to thee." [1]

This decided Margaret in the choice of her state of life, and being overcome by the love of her God, she was henceforth His slave and belonged to Him alone.

It only remained to decide which Order she was to join. Here again she met with many trials and difficulties. She obtained permission to become a Religious provided she entered the Convent of the Ursulines at Mâcon, where a relation of hers was a nun. But it was impossible for her to agree to this, for an interior voice said continually to her : " It is not there that I wish thee to enter but at the Holy Maries." [2]

When she was once looking at a large picture of St. Francis of Sales, that great Bishop seemed to gaze at her in so paternal a manner, calling her at the same time his daughter, that she no longer doubted but that the Saint would soon be her father. Before this was to be realized, however, Margaret had still to mount the heights of Calvary. About this time Madame Alacoque fell seriously ill, and every effort was again made to convince her daughter that she ought to renounce her idea of entering a Convent, otherwise she would have to answer for her mother's death.

Then it was that the Crucifix became the incomparable Master, under Which Margaret learnt so thoroughly the art of suffering, that being enamoured of its superhuman charms, she would at times cast herself at the feet of her crucified Saviour, saying : " How happy should I be, O my Saviour, if Thou wouldst imprint on me the likeness of Thy sufferings !" [3]

[1] **Autobiography, p. 47.** [2] ***Ibid*, p. 49.**
[3] ***Ibid*, p. 50.**

Cardinal Perraud, speaking in after years of this prayer, said : "It is very short, but assuredly it is one of the most beautiful and most generous that a Christian soul could address to the God of the Cross."[1] When Margaret thus expressed to her Saviour her sublime ambition to resemble Him in suffering, He deigned to reply : "This is what I intend to do, provided that thou dost not resist Me, and that thou, on thy side, dost contribute thereto."[2] Thus it was that Margaret gave herself up more and more to the will of her Divine Master. Frequent Communion would have been her greatest happiness, but "they would allow me to communicate only rarely," she says in her "Memoir." "I should have thought myself the happiest person on earth, had I been allowed to do so often, and to pass whole nights alone before the Blessed Sacrament. For when there I felt so safe, that, though I was of an extremely timid nature, I forgot all my fears as soon as I was in this place of my delight. On the eves of Communion I found myself plunged in so profound a silence, on account of the greatness of the action I was about to perform, that I could not speak without great effort ; and afterwards I would have wished neither to eat nor drink, to see nor speak, owing to the greatness of the consolation and peace which I then felt ; I used to hide myself as much as possible in order to learn how to love my Sovereign Good, Who urged me to return Him love for love. But I thought I could never love Him, no matter what I did, unless I learnt how to meditate ; of this I knew only what I had been taught, namely : to abandon myself to all His holy inspirations whenever I was able to shut myself up in some little corner alone with Him, but I was not allowed enough leisure for this."[3] This time of suspense continued until, having been told by a Franciscan Father, that he was doing

[1] Unpublished letter, Archives of the Visitation of Paray.
[2] Autobiography, p. 50. [3] *Ibid*, p. 51.

wrong in thus retaining his sister in the world and not allowing her to follow her vocation, her brother Chrysostom undertook at last to take her himself to some Convent. Her relations insisted upon her going to the Ursulines, but Margaret had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, who, in answer to her prayers and tears, reassured her, saying: "Fear nothing, thou shalt be my true daughter, and I will always be thy good Mother."[1] Margaret now obtained permission to enter a Convent of the Visitation. Several were proposed but none seemed to her to be the one in which her Divine Master had destined her a place. But as she herself afterwards relates: "As soon as they mentioned Paray, my heart was overjoyed, and I gave my consent at once."[2] There were, however, many obstacles yet to be surmounted, but she overcame all, saying repeatedly to herself: "I must conquer or die."[3] At last, thanks to this heroic courage, she went, happy and full of confidence, to present herself at the Convent which she loved to call her "dear Paray."[4] Scarcely had she entered the parlour of the Visitation than she distinctly heard an interior voice which said to her inmost soul: "It is here that I would have thee to be."[5] This caused her such indescribable joy that she begged her brother, who accompanied her, to settle everything that she might enter as soon as possible, for she was firmly resolved never to be a Religious anywhere else but in that house of "Holy Mary." "After this," she writes, "it seemed to me that I began a new life, so great was the peace and happiness which I felt. This made me so gay that those who knew nothing of what had happened, said: 'Look at her, she is not much like a Religious!' And in very truth, I wore more objects of vanity than I had ever done before, and took part more frequently in amusements, on account of the great joy which

[1] Autobiography, p. 53. [2] *Ibid*, p. 54. [3] *Ibid* p. 54.
[4] The date of this first visit was, in all probability, May 25, 1671.
[5] Autobiography, p. 54.

I felt at seeing myself wholly and entirely belonging to my Sovereign Good."[1]

Could anything be more vivid than the above recital? Have those, who accuse Margaret Mary of being a person given to melancholy and self-occupation, ever read this passage? Therein they find a sufficiently spontaneous testimony of the character of this holy soul. There is evidently no question here of her being *dragged* to the place of immolation! She goes forward joyfully herself, as to a fête; and her young brow is already encircled with an aureola, on which may be read the words: *Joy in Sacrifice.*

Nevertheless Margaret had still to remain some time in the midst of her family, in order to make a final settlement of all her affairs. In the rough draft of her will, which is still extant, we read: "drawn up, read and passed in the house of the said young lady testatrix and in a room facing east . . . this nineteenth day of the month of June, 1671."[2]

The hour of final separation drew near. "At last," she writes, "the long wished-for day dawned when I was to bid farewell to the world. Never before had I experienced such joy and such firmness of purpose, for my heart appeared insensible to all the marks of affection and sorrow which were lavished upon me, especially by my mother, and I shed not a tear on leaving her. For it seemed to me that I was like a slave who sees herself delivered from her prison and her chains, in order that she may enter the house of her spouse, to enjoy without reserve his presence, his wealth, and his love. This is what He said to my heart, which was overcome with joy, and I could give no other reason for my vocation to the Visitation, than that I wished to become a daughter of the Blessed Virgin. Nevertheless,

[1] Autobiography, p. 54.

[2] The original is preserved in the study of Mr. Thévenin, notary at Charolles. The Monastery of the Visitation possesses a notarial copy given July 18th, 1692.

I must own that when the moment for my entrance arrived, which was on a Saturday,[1] all my former sufferings returned, which, combined with various others, made such a violent assault upon me that I thought my soul was about to be separated from my body at the moment that I crossed the threshold of the Convent. Immediately after, however, I understood that my Saviour had torn away the sackcloth of my captivity, and was clothing me with His robe of gladness.[2] In a transport of joy, I exclaimed: 'It is here that God wills me to be!' and I felt engraven on my mind the persuasion that this house of God was a holy place and all who lived here must be holy; and that the name of Holy Mary signified that I must become a Saint, cost what it might, sacrificing and abandoning myself to everything without any reserve or restriction."[3] Is not a soul who thus understands the religious life capable of embracing it? In answering in the affirmative we admit the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit. Let us now proceed to study His work of transformation.

[1] June 20, 1671.

[2] "Conscidisti saccum meum et circumdedisti me laetitia."—Psalm xxix. 12.

[3] Autobiography, pp. 55-56.

CHAPTER II

THE POSTULANT. THE NOVICE. FIRST YEARS OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

1671–1673

THE Convent of Paray-le-Monial had been founded by that of Lyons (Bellecour) on September 4th, 1626, which was the First Friday of the month, and thus quite in keeping with the designs of Providence on this house. In 1671 it was governed by Mother Margaret Jeronima Hersant, professed of the first Monastery of Paris. Being filled with the love of God, and highly gifted in the guidance of souls, this wise Superioress saw at once that Margaret Alacoque was a chosen soul.[1]

She was still more confirmed in her opinion by the Mistress of Novices, Sister Anne Françoise Thouvant, who had been the first to enter the Monastery of Paray after its foundation. These two great souls were not long in perceiving that their new postulant had received from Our Saviour Himself lessons of a far higher perfection than those which are usually given to novices. Having an ardent desire to know how to meditate, a science of which she thought she knew nothing, Margaret besought her Mistress to instruct her in the art of mental prayer. But Sister Anne Françoise Thouvant merely replied: "Go and place yourself before Our Lord, like a blank canvas before an artist."[2] Sister Margaret obeyed, and the Lord gave her to understand not only the meaning of those words, but also the mystery they contained, revealing to her that her soul was the canvas on which He wished to paint all the features of His suffering life.

The Divine Artist was about to begin His work.

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 78. [2] Autobiography, p. 56.

But to the ardent desires of this loving soul, who sought in vain for the Cross, He delayed too long, and she complained that she found only joy and happiness in the service of her God. This delay, however, was merely a stratagem of divine love, for it did not deprive our Saint of a single drop of the bitter, yet sanctifying sap, which flows from the tree of the Cross. She herself gives an account of the secret operations of grace during the first days of her religious life.

"He deprived me of everything," writes this predestined soul, "and, after having emptied my heart, and laid bare my soul, He kindled therein such an ardent desire to love and to suffer, that He left me no repose, pursuing me so closely that I was only able to think of how I could love Him and crucify myself." [1]

On August 25, 1671, Feast of St. Louis, King of France, and about two months after her entrance into the Convent, Margaret received the religious habit with the name of Margaret Mary. On that day Our Lord enriched her with His consolations, saying that now was the time of her espousals, and promising that during her novitiate He would make her taste all the sweetness of His love. These words were so literally fulfilled, and the young novice was at times so overwhelmed with consolations and extraordinary graces, that it may be truly said she dwelt in regions far superior to those of earth, which filled her with confusion. Perceiving that she was continually lost in God, her Superiors resolved to test the spirit by which she was actuated. To this end they frequently withdrew her from her spiritual exercises, sending her to sweep when it was time for prayer, and asking of her innumerable acts of sacrifice and self-renunciation. Sister Margaret Mary, finding her heaven in the will of God, was contented with everything, and enjoyed an interior union with Jesus quite as much while actively employed in His service, as when she was wrapt in contemplation at His Sacred Feet.

[1] Autobiography, p. 57.

She went therefore to her little occupations with peace and serenity, singing to herself this simple verse which she had composed :

Plus l'on contredit mon amour,
Plus cet unique Bien m'enflamme ;
Que l'on m'afflige nuit et jour,
On ne peut l'ôter à mon âme.
Plus je souffrirai de douleur,
Plus il m'unira à son Cœur.[1]

She frequently made her meditations on the following words : " It suffices for me, O my Beloved, to be as Thou wilt in Thy presence." At other times she would say : " Oh ! how beautiful is my Beloved, why cannot I love Him perfectly ?" [2] which question might well have made the Angels smile, for was she not always vieing with them in love ?

We have already some idea of the manner in which this holy novice spent her days, we will now see how her nights were passed. " There was no time more agreeable to me than the night, as being the best suited to converse with my Beloved. I begged of my good Angel sometimes to awaken me. At such times I felt my heart wholly filled with God, Whose converse was so sweet to me that I often passed three hours without any other movement or sentiment but that of love, and without its being in my power to fall asleep again. I was no longer able to lie on my left side, being unable to breathe. Once I wished to turn over in order to relieve my shoulder which was paining me, but He said to me that, when carrying His Cross, He did not seek relief by changing it from one side to the other." [3]

Margaret Mary was always mindful of this. One

[1] Autobiography, pp. 58-59. It is difficult to express in a translation the simplicity of the original, but the above verse could be rendered thus : " The more my love is thwarted, the more my Beloved inflames my heart ; let them contradict me day and night, they cannot take Him from me. The more I suffer, the more closely He will unite me to His Heart."

[2] Life and Writings II, p. 129.

[3] *Ibid*, pp. 131-132.

thing alone tormented her. "I felt an insatiable hunger for humiliations and mortifications," she writes, "although owing to my natural susceptibility I felt them keenly. My Divine Master urged me without intermission to ask for them, and this procured me some good ones, for although I was refused those for which I had asked, as being unworthy to perform them, others were imposed upon me which I did not expect, and which were so opposed to my natural inclinations, that I was constrained to say to my good Master in the violence of the efforts which I was forced to make: "Alas, my God, come to my help since Thou art the cause!" He deigned to do so, saying: "Acknowledge that thou canst do nothing without Me, Who will never let thee be wanting in help, as long as thou keepest thy nothingness and thy weakness lost in My strength." [1]

The accomplishment of an act of generosity in a circumstance extremely painful to nature merited for Sister Margaret Mary a more liberal effusion of the divine favours. This act was a very simple one, so trivial that one seems almost surprised to meet with it in such a life; but it shows what price God attaches to the most insignificant actions performed with love. From her earliest childhood, Margaret had always had great aversion for all kinds of cheese. This dislike was in the family, and her brother Chrysostom, when leaving his sister at the Convent, had begged that she might not be forced to overcome herself on that point. As the matter in itself was of no consequence, assent was easily given. Now it happened one day, that the Sister who was serving at table offered, by mistake, some cheese to Sister Margaret Mary. The Novice Mistress, thinking this a good opportunity of testing the courage of her disciple, told her to make the sacrifice for the love of Our Lord, and take the cheese. At first her natural aversion seemed to take the upper hand; on perceiving which the Mistress did not allow

[1] Autobiography, p. 59.

her to make an effort to accomplish the obedience. "Go," she said, "you are not worthy to perform this act of obedience, and I now forbid you to do what I ordered you." But the solicitations of grace were still stronger. For three whole days the struggle between her will to overcome her repugnance and her aversion to do so continued. At last the poor novice, not knowing what to do with herself, went to make known her anguish to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. "Alas! O my God," she said, "hast Thou abandoned me? Must there still be some reserve in my sacrifice instead of its being consumed as a perfect holocaust?" [1] The good God hearkened to the complaints of His afflicted child, and offering her as weapons the words: "*There must be no reserve in love*," [2] gave her at the same time the strength to overcome herself. Nevertheless, we are told by her contemporaries, it was with the same indescribable efforts, that during eight years she always took cheese whenever it was served to the Community, until at last she was forbidden to continue. [3] Our Saviour was well pleased with the victory of His docile servant, and He made her feel His satisfaction to such a degree that she was forced to cry out: "O my God, stay this torrent which overwhelms me, or increase my capacity to receive it." [4]

If we admire the generosity of the Saints, it also does us good to hear of their struggles against human frailty. Sister Margaret Mary had also her hours of weakness during her novitiate. In order to make her overcome too natural an affection for one of her companions, her Divine Master manifested Himself several times to her, saying that He had no desire for a divided heart, and that unless she withdrew from creatures He would withdraw from her. This reproach was decisive; nevertheless in this circumstance, He who calls Himself a

[1] Autobiography, p. 60.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 60.
[3] Life and Writings I, p. 83.
[4] Autobiography, p. 60.

" Jealous God "[1] had to wait several months before He finally triumphed over the resistance of her affectionate disposition. On another occasion, when it seemed to her that it was beyond her strength to overcome herself in certain revolts of nature, Our Lord appeared to her, and showing her His Sacred Body covered with the wounds which He had suffered for love of her, He reproached her for her ingratitude and cowardice in not overcoming herself for love of Him.

" What wouldst Thou have me do, O my God," she said, " my will is stronger than myself?" Our Lord told her that if she placed it in the Wound of His Sacred Side, she would no longer find any difficulty in overcoming herself. " Place it there, then, O my Saviour," she replied, " and enclose it so securely therein that it may never more escape thence." She declared that from that moment everything appeared to her so easy, that she had in reality no more difficulty in overcoming herself.[2]

On yet another occasion, though of a different kind, Our Saviour was still to meet with resistance on the part of this chosen soul. It was probably during her novitiate that He said to her : " I seek a victim to My Heart which will immolate itself as a holocaust to the accomplishment of My designs."[3]

Sister Margaret Mary, being unable to understand how the infinite Sanctity of God could choose her to fill such an office of propitiation, excused herself to the utmost, firmly believing that other souls were far better suited to it than she. But the Lord insists and speaks in a tone of authority. " I wish for no one else but thee, and I will that thou shouldst consent to My desire."[4]

[1] Deus aemulator.—Deut. iv, 24 ; v, 9 ; vi, 15 ; Jos. xxxiv, 19.

[2] Life and Writings I., pp. 83, 84. Cf. II, pp. 127, 128.

[3] II, p. 565. Letter to Father Croiset, Nov. 3, 1689.

[4] II, p. 565. Letter to Father Croiset, Nov. 3, 1689.

She then alleges the excuse that she is under obedience. This, however, is but a vain pretext for Him Who holds all hearts in His hands; He inspires her Superioress to approve His request, and henceforth Sister Margaret Mary will no longer be able to evade the divine demands.

As the time of her novitiate was drawing to its close, she became the object of new attacks. Her virtue could not be denied, since it eclipsed that of all her companions. But the extraordinary paths which this young novice trod gave rise to much perplexity and disquietude in the Community. The Sisters asked themselves whether it would not be imprudent to admit such a person to the Order of the Visitation, since the Holy Founders were so averse to extraordinary ways of sanctity. Was there no illusion in these intimate and frequent communications with the Lord? Such and similar considerations caused them to think it necessary to retard the final reception. Her profession was therefore delayed. She suffered on this account more intensely than can be expressed, for it was not in her power to stay the course of these supernatural graces in her soul. In her desolation, she had recourse to the Lord: "Alas, my Saviour, wilt Thou be the cause of my being sent away?" "Tell thy Superioress," He replied, "that she has nothing to fear in receiving thee. I will be thy guarantee and will answer for thee."[1] These words will ever remain an indisputable testimony of the true and certain vocation of Margaret Mary to the Visitation. Any one possessing a beautiful pearl will earnestly consider how he will have it set, and one of the secrets of an artistic genius is to make the background the more simple, in proportion as the pearl is the more beautiful.

From all eternity the Heart of Jesus had chosen the Institute founded by Saint Francis of Sales and Saint Jane Frances de Chantal to be the setting for *His Pearl*

[1] Autobiography, p. 61.

(Marguerite=Pearl) because, everything in it being simple, humble and hidden, the incomparable splendour of this heavenly pearl would be all the more resplendent in the eyes of the Church. Not only did the Divine Master call Margaret Mary to the Visitation, and no human power could alter this divine election, but He told her also that *He desired that she should prefer her Rule to everything else, and that He Himself would adjust His graces to it.* She must before all things live according to the spirit of her Rule, and far from ever withdrawing her therefrom, the favours of her Divine Spouse will but plunge her more and more deeply into this spirit.

In the year 1672 Mother Marie Françoise de Saumaise, professed of the Monastery of Dijon, was elected Superioress of the Community of Paray, and as such, was destined to become the recipient of the words of Our Divine Lord. Being possessed of a clear judgment and a high degree of sanctity, Mother de Saumaise required a proof as to the supernatural character of what was passing in her spiritual daughter. She therefore ordered her to ask Our Lord to render her useful to her religious Community by her exactitude in carrying out all the monastic observances. Full of divine condescension Our Saviour replied : " 'Tis well, My daughter, I will grant thee all that, for I will render thee more useful to religion than she thinks, but in a manner which is, as yet, known only to Me. Henceforth I will adjust My graces to the spirit of thy Rule, to the will of thy Superiors and to thy weakness : so that thou must regard as suspicious everything that might withdraw thee from the exact observance of thy rule, to which I will that thou shouldst give the preference. Further, I am pleased that thou shouldst prefer the will of thy Superiors to Mine, whenever they may forbid thee to do what I command thee ; suffer them to act as they please with thee, I shall easily make My designs succeed, even by such means as may appear opposed and contrary to them. I reserve for Myself the guidance of

thine interior life, particularly of thy heart, and once having established therein the empire of My pure love, I will never resign it to others." [1]

Mother de Saumaise had doubtless not expected so precise and explicit an answer. However, be that as it may, she was satisfied with it. During the six years that she was Superioress of Saint Margaret Mary, she was able to verify the truth of these predictions which Our Saviour had made known to His beloved daughter and which the latter had transmitted to her in all simplicity, during the days of her novitiate.

The Superioress and the Mistress being no longer in doubt as to the vocation of their novice, the Community soon entered into their sentiments, and, to quote the eloquent words of her contemporaries: "She was received to holy profession by the unanimous votes of the Community." [2]

November 6, 1672 was the day fixed for the ceremony. According to the custom of the Institute this great action is preceded by a retreat of ten days, and it is evident that Saint Margaret Mary made this retreat under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Possessing in her heart Him Whom she loved more than herself, it mattered little to her whether she were occupied in one way or another, for nothing could divert her attention from Him. As a proof of this, the following well-known anecdote is recorded by her contemporaries. In the enclosure of the Monastery was an ass and its foal, the charge of which was committed to the novices, who had received instructions to see that these animals did not do any damage in the kitchen garden. In her fervour and simplicity, Sister Margaret Mary thought that although in retreat previous to her profession, she was nevertheless not dispensed from this act of obedience, and therefore all her spare time was spent in this occupation, which was all the more trying and difficult as she had received an order not to tie them up. "They

[1] Autobiography, p. 61. [2] Life and Writings, I, p. 93.

did nothing but run about," she writes, " I had no rest until the evening Angelus, when I went in to supper." During part of Matins she was obliged to return to the stable to give food to the ass and its foal. " I felt so happy in this occupation," she continues, " that I would not have minded if it had lasted all my life." [1] It was, however, left to her only for a short time longer, and the Sisters were charmed on seeing to what an extent she carried her virtue. One day being about to interrupt a conversation with Our Divine Saviour in order to prevent these animals from running away, Our Lord said to her : " Let them alone, they will do no harm." [2] This truly obedient soul believed the words of her God, and despite the minutest search, the Sisters, who had seen the animals running about the kitchen garden, could not find the slightest trace of their passage.

The tradition of the Visitation of Paray relates that it was under a clump of filbert trees which are still to be seen in the enclosure of the Monastery that Our Divine Master appeared to this happy novice, thus rewarding her superabundantly for her fatigue in taking care of the ass and its foal. One day pointing out this clump of nut trees to a Sister she said : " This is a place of grace for me ; for it was here that God gave me to understand the advantages of suffering, by the knowledge and lights which He gave me concerning His Sacred Passion." [3] Alas ! why did she not reveal to us these lights ! She contented herself with saying : " It is an abyss so deep that I must refrain from describing it." [4]

A careful examination of certain circumstances authorises us to place during this retreat previous to her profession a grace which Saint Margaret Mary received on " a Feast of All Saints," when it was distinctly said to her :

[1] Autobiography, p. 67. [2] Life and Writings I, p. 88 note.
[3] I, p. 521. Deposition of Sr. Claude Marguerite Billet. Process of 1715. [4] Autobiography, p. 67.

" There is nothing sullied in innocence,
Nothing is lost in power ;
Nothing passes away in that abode of bliss,
There all is made perfect in love." [1]

The meaning of this was, that her soul should be pure and spotless, and that she should abandon everything to Him Who is Power itself. In heaven nothing passes away, everything is eternal and is consummated in love. At the same time a slight glimpse of this was vouchsafed to her. " As I was in retreat at the time," she writes, " I passed the whole day in this ineffable joy, and it seemed to me that I had but to go and enjoy it at once, but the following words gave me to understand that I was still far from this :

In vain thy longing heart desires
To find an entrance there ;
Who to this heavenly bliss aspires,
On earth the Cross must bear." [2]

Our Saviour then placed before her eyes a picture of all she would have to suffer during the remainder of her life. To express her feelings at this sight she has but one word, which is, however, full of energy. " My whole being shuddered at the sight." [3]

When preparing for Confession, she was greatly troubled in her anxiety to remember all her sins. The Divine Master reassured her, saying : " Why dost thou torment thyself ? Do what lies in thy power and I will supply what is wanting ; in this Sacrament I ask for nothing so much as a humble and contrite heart." [4] She therefore made her Confession with profound sentiments of humility and contrition. In order to express what then passed in her soul at the moment of absolution, Saint Margaret Mary employs a striking comparison. " It seemed to me that I saw and felt myself stripped, and at the same time clothed in a white garment, and I heard these

[1] Autobiography, p. 77.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 77.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 78.
[4] *Ibid*, p. 78.

words: 'Behold the robe of innocence with which I clothe thy soul, that thou mayest henceforth live only the life of the Man-God; that is to say, that thou mayest live, as living no longer, but allowing Me to live in thee: For I am thy life, and thou shalt no longer live, but in Me and by Me.'" [1]

How jealous Our Saviour was of this robe of innocence for His beloved! In another place she gives her Divine Master's words at greater length: "My beloved, I, thy Spouse, thy God and thy Love, have come to clothe thy soul with the robe of innocence, in order that thou mayest henceforth live only the life of a Man-God; to this end I will simplify and purify the powers of thy soul, that they may receive no other impress. It is in the presence of the Blessed Trinity and of My Holy Mother that I confer this grace upon thee; if once it is lost, thou shalt never recover it, and thou wilt fall into so profound an abyss on account of the height of the place wherein I have lodged thee, which is no other than the Wound of My Heart, that thou wilt never be able to raise thyself up again after such a fall." [2]

On All Souls' Day, November 2, 1672, Sister Margaret Mary, wishing to make reparation to Our Lord for the abuse she had made of His graces, immolated herself anew to the divine good pleasure, and begged Our Lord to receive and unite with His own the holocaust which she desired to offer Him. Her Divine Master replied: "Remember that it is a crucified God Whom thou dost wish to espouse, thou must therefore make thyself like to Him. Bid adieu to all the pleasures of life, for there will no longer be any for thee but such as are marked with the Cross." [3]

During this retreat Sister Margaret Mary traced for herself a plan of perfection, or rather the Holy Ghost dictated it to her in a masterly manner. "These are my resolutions which are to last to the end of my life,

[1] Autobiography, pp. 78-79. [2] Life and Writings II, p. 178.
[3] *Ibid*, II, p. 130. Cf. I, pp. 86, 87.

since my Beloved Himself dictated them to me. After I had received Him into my heart He said to me : ' Behold the Wound in My Side, wherein thou art to make thy abode now and for ever. Here thou wilt be able to preserve the robe of innocence with which I have clothed thee in order that thou mayest live from henceforth the life of a Man-God. Live as no longer living, that I may live perfectly in thee. Think of thy body and all that may befall it as though it existed no longer ; act as if it were no longer thou who dost act but I alone in thee. To this end all thy powers and senses must be buried in Me. Thou must be deaf and dumb, blind and insensible to all earthly objects. Thou must will as no longer willing ; thou must be without judgment, desire, affection, or any other will but that of My good pleasure, which should form all thy delight. Seek nothing out of Me unless thou wouldst do injury to My power and offend Me grievously, since I wish to be all to thee. Be ever ready to receive Me ; I shall always be ready to give Myself to thee. Thou wilt often be delivered to the fury of thy enemies, but fear nothing; I will encompass thee with My power, and will be Myself the reward of thy victories. Be careful never to look at thyself out of Me. Let thy motto be : ' To love and suffer blindly.' One only heart, one only love, one God alone.' "

The following was written in her own blood : " I, a poor miserable nothing, protest to my God that I will offer and sacrifice myself to all that He desires of me, offering my heart wholly to the accomplishment of His good pleasure, without regard to any other interest than that of His greater glory and His pure love. To this I consecrate and give up my whole being and every moment of my life.

I belong for ever to my Beloved, as His slave, His handmaid, and His creature. He is wholly mine and I am His unworthy spouse : Sister Margaret Mary, dead from henceforth to the world. Wholly from God and

nothing from myself, wholly to God and nothing to myself, wholly for God and nothing for myself." [1]

On November 6, 1672, according to the ceremonial of the Order, she prostrated herself under the pall, after having first pronounced the sacred vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, that triple and blessed chain which united her for ever to the " God of her heart and the Heart of her God." The celebrant then said to her : " Sister, you are dead to the world and to yourself, to live no longer but to God." [2]

Let us hear in her own words again the response which these words awakened in her soul : " Having at last attained to the long desired happiness of holy profession, it was on this day that my Divine Lord was pleased to receive me as His spouse in a wholly inexpressible manner. I can only say that He treated me as a spouse of Thabor, and this was to me harder than death, seeing in myself no resemblance to my Spouse, Whom I beheld all wounded and disfigured on Mount Calvary. But He said to me : ' Leave it to Me to act, everything has its time. I would have thee for the present to be the object of My love, which desires to make thee its plaything, and treat thee as do children their toys. Thou must abandon thyself wholly to My will, blindly and without resistance, allowing Me to accomplish My will at thy expense. But thou wilt lose nothing thereby.' He promised further that He would never leave me, saying : ' Be ever ready to receive Me, because henceforth I will make My abode in thee and will hold familiar converse with thee !' " [3]

But the divine favours did not cease here. Our Saviour put a seal on those which He had previously conferred upon His servant. Immediately after the words just quoted she adds : " Henceforth Our Lord

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 190, 191. Cf. I, pp. 92, 93.

[2] Custom Book and Directory of the Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary. *Formula for the Profession of the Sisters of he Visitation of Holy Mary.* Article XI.

[3] Autobiography, p. 62.

allowed me to enjoy His divine presence in a manner which I had not yet experienced ; and, judging from the effects which it has ever since produced in me, I never received so great a favour. I perceived Him quite close to me, and heard His voice, much better than if it had been with my bodily senses, for in that case I could have turned away from it, had I wished to do so ; but being as it was, I could not put any obstacle in the way of this impression, which I had no share in producing in myself. This divine presence impressed me with so deep a sense of self-annihilation that I felt, as it were, plunged in the abyss of my own nothingness from which I have not been able since to withdraw myself through respect for this Infinite Majesty, in presence of Which I would have wished to remain constantly either prostrate on my face or on my knees, which I always did as far as my occupations and my weakness permitted." [1] At another time, referring again to this immense grace which Our Saviour granted her, she writes : " He told me that I had nothing to fear, since He promised me one of the greatest graces which He had ever conferred on His friends, namely that of gratifying me with His actual and continual presence." [2] The Lord then forewarned her of the manner in which He would punish her for her faults : " When thou committest any faults," He said, " I shall purify thee of them by sufferings if thou dost not do so by penance. I shall not on their account deprive thee of My presence, but I shall render it so painful to thee, that this shall take the place of every other torment." " From that moment," she continues, " He kept His promise so well that He was constantly present to me. I always felt Him near me, in the same way as one feels close to a person whom the darkness of night prevents one from seeing with one's bodily eyes. But the penetrating eye-

[1] Autobiography, pp. 62, 63.
[2] Life and Writings II, p. 568. Letter to Father Croiset, November 3, 1689.

sight of love made me see and feel Him in a manner far more certain and delightful, and also in manifold ways."[1] We read in her autobiography: "Now that my Sovereign accompanied me everywhere, I no longer heeded either time or place; I felt indifferent to every use that they desired to make of me, being fully assured that, having given Himself to me without any merit on my part, but out of His pure goodness, no one could take Him away from me, and this made me feel happy everywhere."[2]

After her profession Sister Margaret Mary occupied various posts in the Monastery. "Everywhere she comported herself with her usual fervour,"[3] write her contemporaries, but she also gathered everywhere the myrrh of sufferings and humiliations in regard to which she was, however, never satiated.

She was first named assistant in the infirmary where, she herself owns, God alone knew all she had to suffer, "both from my own quick and sensitive nature," she writes, "as also from creatures and from the devil. The latter often made me fall and break all that I carried in my hands. Then he would mock me, laughing in my face, saying: 'O you clumsy creature, you will never do any good!' This made me so sad and dejected that I scarcely knew what to do, for he often rendered me powerless to tell our Mother about it, as obedience overthrew and deprived him of all his power over me."[4] When the sanctification of His elect is concerned, God will overthrow the world rather than permit anything to hinder the accomplishment of His designs, we must therefore not be astonished at anything in the plans which He adopted, in order to bring Margaret Mary to that degree of sanctity to which He called her. Everything, even to the minutest detail, will be divinely combined and ordained in such a man-

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 568. Letter to Father Croiset, November 3, 1689.
[2] Autobiography, p. 66.
[3] Life and Writings I, p. 100.
[4] Autobiography, p. 81.

ner that the mind, the body and the heart of His beloved may be in a continual state of sacrifice.

The moral portrait of the Servant of God was vividly drawn by Mother Greyfié, Superioress of the Visitation of Paray, who, speaking subsequently of Margaret Mary says : " She was naturally judicious and wise, full of common sense, of a pleasant humour, with a heart full of charity ; in a word, it may be said that she was a subject well suited to succeed in all she undertook, but the Lord had heard and answered her prayer, to remain unknown and hidden in abjection and suffering." [1] Again, a little later on, Father Croiset writes of her : " God had endowed her with a good understanding, a solid, clear and penetrating judgment, a noble soul and a large heart." [2]

It is therefore a well-proved fact that Sister Margaret Mary was not a narrow-minded person, of a sad and melancholy disposition, as she is sometimes depicted. She was a person of good judgment, and a Religious who commanded both love and respect, but by the permission of God, all her good qualities were generally hidden under the veil of humiliation.

In compensation, however, the communications between the Lord and this chosen soul were incessant. One day after Holy Communion He vouchsafed to ask Sister Margaret Mary to renew the sacrifice which she had already made of her liberty and her whole being, " which I did with all my heart, ' on condition, O my Sovereign Master,' I added, ' that Thou wilt never let anything extraordinary appear in me, but what may cause me humiliation and abjection in the eyes of

[1] Memoir of Mother Greyfié.—Life and Writings I, p. 385. The Autograph MS. is no longer extant ; the variations of the version from which we quote are taken from a very ancient copy preserved in the archives of the Visitation of Paray.

[2] Sketch of the Life of a Religious of the Visitation of Holy Mary, *whom God made use of to establish the devotion to the Sacred Heart, and who died in the odour of sanctity, October* 17, 1690. Lyons, M.DC.XCI.

creatures, and tend to lower me in their esteem: for alas, O my God, I know my weakness, and fear to betray Thee, and that Thy gifts should not be in safety with me.' 'Fear nothing, My daughter,' He replied, 'I will arrange everything, for I will constitute Myself Guardian of all and will render thee powerless to resist Me.' 'But, my God, wilt Thou always let me live without suffering?'"[1] Our Lord then showed her a large cross covered with flowers, assuring her that the flowers would gradually fall off and that only the thorns would remain. Her soul, far from being alarmed, was ravished by this announcement.

It must not for a moment be supposed that amidst all these heavenly favours Sister Margaret Mary neglected to practise the more humble and abject virtues, which form the true and solid foundations of her Order. In January 1673, St. Francis of Sales was pleased to give her new lights upon this subject. He showed her that the virtues which he had always most desired for his daughters were those by which he himself had been more closely united to God, namely, charity towards God and one's neighbour and the most profound humility.

To this young Sister, but lately professed, the Holy Founder confides a sad secret. He complains that his spiritual daughters have fallen away from that double spirit of charity and humility, which he had striven to imprint in his little Congregation, and he showed her the way by which it could be restored to vigour. It is evident, therefore, that he recognized in Sister Margaret Mary a true Daughter of the Visitation. Who knows whether the God of all mercy had not made known to this great Bishop, that in the near future the Sacred Heart of Jesus would be given to his cherished Institute of the Visitation, through the medium of this humble Sister, who had made her solemn vows but three months before?

[1] Autobiography, pp. 65-66.

Seeing that her daughter continued to receive such extraordinary graces Mother de Saumaise ordered her to commit to writing all that passed within her. She felt, at first, a great repugnance to doing this, but Our Saviour reproved her, saying: "Why dost thou refuse to obey My voice, and put in writing what comes from Me, and not from thyself? Thou hast no share in it beyond a simple adherence to My will. Consider what thou art and what thou dost deserve, and thou wilt understand whence comes the good which thou dost possess. Why dost thou fear, since I have given thee a place of refuge, where everything becomes easy?"[1]

She therefore obeyed, and it is thanks to the pages which she then wrote that we are enabled to follow her more surely during the early days of her religious life. Unhappily the autograph MS. of this "Memoir" is no longer extant, merely some ancient copies thereof, which, though not at all irreproachable, have nevertheless their value.

Let us quote a few passages; they will be a new revelation of what passes in the souls of the Saints.

"One day, on the eve of Communion, I asked my Jesus to unite my heart to His, for this was all I aspired to, though indeed I said to myself: 'How could it be that *nothing* should be united to the Infinite Being?' 'I know, O my God,' I said, 'that this divine union can be effected only by Thy love.' Upon this I was allowed to see, with the highest point of my understanding, His Sacred Heart, brighter than the sun, and of an immense size. A minute speck, a dark and shapeless atom was striving to approach this beauteous light. But all its efforts would have been in vain, if this loving Heart had not drawn it to Itself, saying: 'Lose thyself in My immensity and see that thou never go out therefrom. For shouldst thou do so, thou wilt never again enter therein.' I find my heart so carried

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 132, 133.

away during mental prayer, that I feel sometimes as though it no longer belonged to me, and I am in deep peace with no other anxiety than that of not loving my God and of not making good use of my time in the exercise of holy love."

"Thinking sometimes that it might be the devil who kept me thus bound, I prayed to God, saying: 'Make known to me, O Lord, the deceits of the devil that I may avoid them.' But my Well-Beloved gave me to understand, that the devil can have no knowledge of what passes in a soul, except by some exterior sign, and that it is impossible for him to give peace to a heart."[1]

Sister Margaret Mary was subject to a loss of voice, which, preventing her from singing the holy Office, was a painful privation to her. On one occasion she had been suffering for some time under this trial, which she regarded as a punishment, when, on the Eve of the Feast of the Visitation, July 1, 1673, after fruitless efforts to join the Community in the recitation of Matins, she sought to annihilate herself in adoration. Suddenly during the Te Deum, as she stood with her arms crossed in her sleeves, a heavenly light, more brilliant than the sun, rested upon them in the form of a little child. Transported at such a sight, she said in profound silence: 'My Lord and my God, by what excess of love dost Thou abase Thine infinite greatness?' 'I am come, O My daughter, to ask thee why thou dost so often tell Me not to approach thee?' 'Thou knowest, O my Sovereign Good, that it is because I am not worthy to approach Thee, and far less to touch Thee.' 'Learn, then, that the more thou retirest into thine own nothingness, the more will My greatness lower itself to find thee.' Fearing that it might be an angel of Satan, the humble Sister cried out: "If it be Thou, O my God, enable me to sing Thy praises." In the same moment her voice returned, stronger than ever; she was able to continue the Te Deum with the

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 131.

Community, and she recited the remainder of Matins without permitting the caresses which the Divine Infant lavished upon her, to divert in any way her attention from the office. Our Lord was so pleased with this that He said to her : " I wanted to try the motive which thou hast in singing My praises ; hadst thou been for a moment less attentive, I should have retired."

" Having retained the use of my voice for a considerable time," she continues, " I again lost it, and on begging Our Lord to restore it to me, He replied that it was not mine, He had merely lent it to me in order to oblige me to believe ; and that I ought to be equally well pleased either to lose or possess it. Ever since I have remained indifferent in this regard, nothing being so profitable to a soul as the most perfect self-abandonment in all respects." [1]

She held this maxim from Our Saviour Himself, Who had given her to understand that she should submit indifferently to the divine good pleasure, without binding it in any way, adding : " I will make thee understand later on that I am a wise and learned Director, One Who knows how to guide souls, when, forgetful of themselves, they abandon themselves to Me." [2]

He rebuked in her the slightest sign of an imperfection. One Easter Sunday, Sister Margaret Mary was prevented from making her meditation with the rest of the Community, and this excited within her a slight feeling of annoyance. The Divine Master was not long in making Himself heard. " Know, My daughter," He said, " that the prayer of submission and sacrifice is more agreeable to Me than contemplation." [3]

It is not possible to narrate all the lessons which she received from the divine lips, nor to enumerate all the visions with which she was gratified. Let it suffice to say, that day by day Our Saviour made her advance

[1] Life and Writings, I, pp. 109-111.
[2] Autobiography, p. 69. [3] Life and Writings I, p. 107.

another step along the sublime and mysterious path, which was to lead to the great revelation of the Sacred Heart. This Divine Heart had already been manifested to her, and although it was only in a private and personal manner, and concerning herself alone, nevertheless Margaret Mary began to feel consumed with the desire of making the love of the Heart of her God everywhere known.

One day an interior voice told her repeatedly that she was on the brink of a precipice. Not knowing how to explain this she confided her trouble to Our Lord: "O Thou sole Love of my heart," she exclaimed, "let me understand what it is that disquiets me." During prayer Our Lord presented Himself to her, all covered with wounds, telling her to fix her eyes on the opening in His Sacred Side, which was an unfathomable abyss, opened by an arrow of infinite length, namely that of love. If she wished to avoid the abyss, which, as she complained to Him, she did not understand, she must plunge herself, He said, into that of His Heart, Which is the dwelling place of those who love Him. The soul finds therein the source of living waters with which to purify itself, receiving at the same time the life of grace, of which sin had deprived it, while the heart finds a furnace of love which permits it to live only a life of love.[1]

One day when Sister Margaret Mary felt her soul plunged, as it were, in a species of agony, Our Saviour honoured her with a visit, saying: "Enter, My daughter, into this delightful garden, in order to revive thy languishing soul." She understood that He alluded to His Sacred Heart, of which the variety of flowers was as pleasing as their beauty was admirable. But as she dared not touch them He invited her, saying: "Thou mayest gather them at thy pleasure." Then casting herself at His Sacred Feet she cried out: "O my Divine Love, I wish for none but Thyself,

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 111. II, p. 142.

Who art a bundle of myrrh to me, which I would fain carry continually in the arms of my affection." "Thou hast chosen well," replied Our Saviour, "because no other flowers are lasting in this life, but soon fade. This myrrh alone, which thou hast chosen, can retain its beauty and its fragrance. This life is its time and its season, there is none in eternity."[1]

On another occasion she writes: "Whilst making my reading in order to contribute to the conversation after Vespers,[2] my Beloved presented Himself to me and said: 'I will give thee to read in the Book of Life which contains the science of love.' And revealing to me His Sacred Heart He made me read in It the following words: 'My love reigns in suffering, it triumphs in humility, and rejoices in unity,' which words were so imprinted on my mind that I can never forget them."[3]

On October 4, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, God gave her this seraphic patriarch to be her special guide, after having first shown her the incomparable glory which he enjoys in heaven, and telling her at the same time that he was one of the greatest favourites of His Heart. Marked with the sacred stigmata, a passionate lover of poverty, wishing to know nought save Jesus Christ crucified, Francis had been a living image of the Saviour of the world. On this account he had great power in heaven to obtain for souls the efficacious application of the merits of the Precious Blood. It seems as though his pierced hands were the best suited to become the channel through which the adorable Blood was to flow over sinners. St. Francis of Assisi was also a powerful intercessor for religious Orders which had fallen from their first fervour. Our Lord

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 153. Cf. I, p. 113.

[2] At the Visitation every Religious should as far as possible contribute to the edification of her Sisters by relating some passage from her spiritual reading during the assembly held after Vespers.

[3] Life and Writings II, pp. 152, 153. Cf. I, p. 103.

told His servant that it was in token of His love, that He gave her such a protector to guide her in the midst of her troubles and sufferings. [1]

The more Our Lord inclines towards her the more He initiates her into the indescribable sufferings of His Divine Heart. One day the Saint was meditating upon the Agony of Our Saviour in the Garden of Olives, when she felt herself strongly urged to participate in the anguish of the Man-God. He was pleased to hear her prayer. "It is here," He said, "that I suffered interiorly more than during all the rest of My Passion, seeing Myself abandoned by heaven and earth, and weighed down with all the sins of mankind. I appeared thus in the presence of the sanctity of God, Who, without having regard to My innocence, punished Me in His wrath, making Me drink of the chalice filled with the gall and bitterness of His just indignation, and as though He had forgotten the name of Father, sacrificing Me to His just anger. No creature can comprehend the intensity of the torments which I suffered at that time. It is the same grief which a criminal soul feels, when it stands before the tribunal of the Divine Sanctity, Which weighs upon it, punishing it and overwhelming it, in Its just wrath."

Continuing His adorable disclosures, Our Saviour added: "My justice is irritated and is ready to punish hidden sinners by open chastisements, unless they do penance, and I will make known to thee when My jus-

[1] On closely studying this question, it would seem more correct to give October 4, 1673, as the date of this grace, rather than October 4, 1686, which we find in the "Life and Writings." If we may judge from some ancient copies, the narrative of this grace seems to be comprised in the accounts which were written by order of Mother de Saumaise. Since God reserved to this humble Sister the privilege of having the great St. Francis of Assisi as guide on the way of the Cross, it is more probable that it was in 1673, when there still remained to her a long path to traverse rather than in 1686, when her mission was already fulfilled, all was in a state of peace, and the Sacred Heart had triumphed.

tice is ready to inflict its blows upon those guilty souls. When thou shalt feel My sanctity weigh heavily upon thee, then must thou raise thy heart and thy hands to heaven by prayer and good works, presenting Me continually to My Father as a victim of love, immolated and offered for the sins of the whole world, placing Me as a rampart and sure fortress between His justice and sinners."[1]

Our Lord then told Margaret Mary that she would feel herself surrounded by His mercy when He was about to be propitious to one of these sinful souls, and that, if that soul persevered to the end, she would be shown some slight sample of the joy which the Blessed experience on that account.

In the autumn of 1673, during the first retreat which followed her profession, she felt the hand of God weigh heavily upon her. "For the first two or three days," she writes, "His Divine Sanctity weighed so heavily upon me that I was unable to pray, and could scarcely bear the interior grief which I felt. I experienced so great a feeling of despair, and such grief at appearing before my God, that if the same power which made me suffer had not supported me, I would willingly a thousand times have buried, destroyed and annihilated myself, had it been in my power. And yet, in spite of all, I could not withdraw from the divine presence. It pursued me everywhere, as a criminal on the point of receiving condemnation; though at the same time I felt so great a submission to the will of my God that I was ready to receive all the pains and sorrows which He would be pleased to send me with the same love and readiness as the sweetness of His love."[2]

Sufferings on the part of creatures are often very bitter to a sensitive nature; but sufferings which come from the Creator Himself are far more acute. Job said that the Lord "tormented him wonderfully."[3]

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 164, 165. Cf. I, pp. 283, 284.
[2] Life and Writings II, p. 165 note. [3] Job x, 16.

Margaret Mary experienced this *divine torment* when she felt the heavy weight of what she calls the two-fold sanctity of God: *the sanctity of love and the sanctity of justice.* Whilst bearing the weight of the sancity of love, the Servant of God was to expiate for the Souls in Purgatory. The weight of the sanctity of justice would make her suffer for sinners, particularly for those who were consecrated to God, "for whom," her Divine Spouse said to her one day, "I will make thee see and feel in the future everything that it behoves thee to suffer for My love."[1] Let us listen to her whilst she describes, in inspired words, the operation of this love in her soul.

"At another time this Sovereign of my soul said to me: 'I desire to be thy All in all, thy joy and thy consolation, but I shall also be thy torment.' I failed not to experience the effect of these words. Amongst His divine perfections those which were to bring about the fulfilment of His promises, were the sanctity of His love and the sanctity of His justice. I confess that it is difficult for a creature to describe their effects. Never have I suffered anything so painful as this sanctity of justice, which imprints itself upon the soul in so terrible a manner, that she would willingly cast herself into all imaginable pains, offering herself to suffer even those of the damned, rather than appear before the sanctity of God stained with a single sin. The soul resembles boiling oil, which, penetrating the very marrow of the bones, renders the body insensible to every other pain; this latter seems rather a refreshment than suffering. What I find most painful, while in this state, is the presence of my Saviour, when He is pleased to favour me with it. The soul is so deeply impressed by His purity, that seeing herself in so abominable a condition, she becomes insupportable to herself. She would wish to escape and hide herself, but it is in vain that she attempts to do so. This God of

[1] Autobiography, p. 64.

love, taking pleasure in seeing her in this state, causes her to find everywhere that from which she fain would flee; not that she would wish on any account to lose her Beloved from sight by doing anything that could be displeasing to Him; she would rather suffer a thousand deaths at the sight of her own unworthiness, often saying with St. Peter: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinner.' Far from desiring to be delivered from this state, I would have wished to see my sufferings increase each moment.

The sanctity of love gives rise to scarcely less suffering, except that this pain causes such joy and contentment to the soul that it is equally difficult to describe. It fills the soul with such an ardent desire to be united to God, that she has no repose either day or night, for both bed and board seem to her as a gibbet to which she only goes in order to be crucified. Conversation is a torment to her, for, God manifesting Himself incessantly to the soul and discovering to her the treasures with which He enriches her, as well as the ardent love He has for her, and her little response, His love urges her in so pressing a manner to love Him, that it is only the Divine Author of those operations Who can adequately express what they are. The soul has then no other interest or desire, nor any other yearning, but for her only Love; everything else seems to be useless and superfluous."[1]

The divine warning became more and more frequent. One day, she believed she heard these words: "The Lord is weary of waiting, He will enter into His granaries to sift His wheat and to separate the good from the bad." She tried, however, to turn her mind away from this thought, as from a distraction. But again the sanctity of God weighed heavily upon her, and an

[1] Archives of the Visitation of Paray. Copy of the account which the V. H. Mother de Saumaise made our Sister Margaret Mary write during the six years she governed this Community and which was given to us after the death of this dear Mother. (Mother de Saumaise died at Dijon, July 31, 1694).

almighty voice made itself heard : " My chosen people persecute Me secretly, and they have irritated My justice ! But I will manifest their secret sins by visible chastisements. For I will sift them in the sieve of My sanctity, to separate them from My beloved ones." Then discovering to her His Heart, all torn and wounded, Our Saviour added : " Behold the wounds which I receive from My chosen people. Others content themselves with striking My Body, these attack My Heart, Which has never ceased to love them." [1]

At another time, presenting Himself to her under a still more suffering aspect, His Sacred Heart seeming to be torn with grief, He said : " Behold the state to which My chosen people have reduced Me, even those whom I had destined to appease My justice, and lo ! they persecute Me in secret. If they do not amend I will chastise them severely ; I will withdraw the just and will sacrifice the remainder to My wrath, which will be enkindled against them."

Faithful to the teaching of her Beloved, Margaret Mary concludes, saying : " I presented to Him His own suffering love, one single glance of which is capable of appeasing His wrath." [2]

" Once having suffered a long time under the weight of the sanctity of God, I lost my voice and my strength, and I felt so great a confusion at appearing before creatures, that death would have been preferable to me. Holy Communion became so painful that it would be difficult to explain how trying it was for me to approach It, though I was not allowed to do otherwise, for He Himself had placed me in this state, and forbade me to keep away. I could say, with the prophet, that my tears served me for food night and day. Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, Who was my only refuge, treated me with such indignation that I endured a kind of agony, and I could remain before Him only

[1] Life and Writings, II, p. 175, Cf. I, p. 263.
[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 153, Cf. I, p. 111.

by doing great violence to myself. And if, at times, I went out of the usual hour to prostrate myself before Him, saying: 'Whither, O Divine Justice, wouldst Thou have me to go, since Thou dost accompany me everywhere?' I entered and left His presence without knowing what to do, and without finding any rest but that of my grief."[1]

One day when Our Lord prescribed her certain prayers and pious practices, she answered with simplicity: "Thou knowest, my Lord, that I am not my own, and that I can only do what my Superioress will order me." "I understand it not otherwise," He replied, "for, Almighty as I am, I wish nothing from thee but what is authorized by thy Superioress; give good heed to the words of Truth Itself: All Religious who are disunited with, and separated from their Superiors, should consider themselves as vessels of reprobation, in which all that is good is changed into corruption (toutes les bonnes liqueurs sont changées en corruption), and on which the Divine Sun of Justice, as He pours out His rays, produces the same effect as the rays of the sun upon mud. These souls are so entirely rejected by My Heart that the more they endeavour to approach It by means of the Sacraments, prayers and other exercises, the further do I withdraw from them, so great is the horror which I have of them."[2] The lesson was a sharp one, but it did not refer to the obedient soul who so humbly appropriated it to herself; it was merely necessary for her to remember it in order to repeat it to others. In telling her personally: "I love obedience, and without it no one can please Me," Our Saviour knew well that it was sufficient to attach her for ever and irrevocably to this virtue of the perfect.

The soul of Sister Margaret Mary can no more live out of God, than our human nature can live without the air it breathes. Her element is the "plenitude of God."

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 182.
[2] *Ibid* II, 176. Cf. I, p. 264.

When describing her feelings she is at times sublime: "My Beloved has consumed in me every desire but that of receiving His divine love, and has left me without fear of anything but sin . . . All things find their rest only in their centre, and each one seeks that which is proper to it, even so my heart is wholly buried in its centre, which is the humble Heart of Jesus. It finds therein an unquenchable thirst for humiliations, contempt and oblivion on the part of creatures, for I never feel happier than when I am conformed to my crucified Spouse. It is this which makes me love my own abjection more than my life, holding this precious treasure clasped to my heart as a pledge of the love of my Well-Beloved, which should never quit me for a moment."[1] "When I awake," she says, "I seem to find my God present, and my heart unites itself to Him as to its first beginning and its only happiness. This gives me so strong a desire to go before the Blessed Sacrament that whilst I am dressing the minutes seem to be hours; this longing is so ardent and so importunate, and I feel so strongly drawn and urged by it, that it is impossible for me to resist it. I generally present myself to Him as a sick person before an all-powerful physician, away from whom I can find neither refuge nor comfort. I keep myself at His Feet as a living victim which has no other desire than to be wholly offered and immolated to Him, in order to be consumed as a holocaust in the pure flames of His love. I then feel my heart aglow as if in a burning furnace. It seems to me that my spirit quits me to go and lose itself in the infinite greatness of its God, without its being in my power to apply it to the subject of the meditation, but it is satisfied with this one subject. My understanding has neither light nor knowledge but that which this divine Sun of Justice communicates to it. I have no other impression or movement but that of loving Him, and I sometimes feel myself so strongly urged to do this, that I

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 178, 179.

would willingly give a thousand lives to testify to Him thereby the desire I have of loving Him. During this time I make every effort to embrace the Beloved of my soul, not with the arms of my body, but with those of my interior, which are the powers of my soul."

She tries to explain still further what she experiences, and then continues: "Such is my ordinary employment in prayer, though it is not I that make it, but my God makes it Himself in me, miserable creature that I am, as I generally finish it without knowing what I have been about, and without making any resolution, petition or offering, except that of my Jesus to His Eternal Father in the following manner: O my God, I offer Thee Thy well beloved Son as my thanksgiving for all the blessings Thou conferrest upon me, as my petition, my offering, my adoration, and all my resolutions. In fine, I offer Him to Thee for my love and my all. Receive Him, Eternal Father, for all Thou desirest of me. I have nothing to offer Thee which is not unworthy of Thee, except Him, the possession of Whom Thou givest me with so much love."[1]

The soul of this truly humble Religious was always as an open book for her Superiors, to whom she related all that passed within her, though, "often," she owns, "I did not understand what I told them."[2] Too well versed in the spiritual life not to know that God is free to communicate Himself to whom He pleases, Mother de Saumaise and Sister Thouvant were nevertheless sorely perplexed at seeing what was going on in Sister Margaret Mary. Religious prudence obliged them to arm this young Sister against any feeling of vain complacency; so they warned her that such extraordinary ways were not suitable to the Daughters of Holy Mary, and they sought to destroy in the soul of their faithful disciple, as far as lay in their power, all these supernatural operations. The latter submitted humbly,

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 133-135. Cf. I, pp. 90-92.
[2] Autobiography, p. 64.

following exactly all that was ordered her by holy obedience in order to withdraw from that higher power which was attracting her so strongly. But all her efforts were in vain. There is nothing more touching nor more beautiful than the following dialogue, which then took place between Sister Margaret Mary and the only Love of her soul : " I complained to Him, saying : 'Alas, my Sovereign Lord, why dost Thou not leave me in the common way of the Daughters of Holy Mary ? Hast Thou brought me into Thy holy house to destroy me ? Give Thy extraordinary graces to those chosen souls, who will correspond with them better than I do, for I only resist Thee ; all I wish for is Thy love and Thy Cross, that suffices for me to become a good Religious, and that is all I desire.' To which Our Saviour replied : 'Let us continue the conflict, My daughter, I am quite content to do so. We will see which of the two will gain the victory, the Creator or His creature, Strength or weakness, Omnipotence or nothingness, but whosoever triumphs will remain conqueror for ever.' "[1] It was indeed the Creator Who triumphed, and of this soul who asked only to become " a good Religious," He made a Saint whom He willed to employ in order to manifest *the last effort* of divine charity towards men. We are now nearing the hour destined from all eternity for the regeneration of the world by the Sacred Heart.

The instrument which was to co-operate in this work has been purified from all earthly alloy. The Lord can now take possession of it and use it. Margaret Mary is ready.

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[1] Autobiography, pp. 64, 65.

CHAPTER III

MARGARET MARY IS CHOSEN BY GOD TO MANIFEST TO MANKIND "THE LAST EFFORT OF HIS LOVE." THE GREAT REVELATIONS OF THE SACRED HEART. FATHER DE LA COLOMBIÈRE.

1673–1677

It was the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, December 27, 1673, and having a little more leisure than usual, Sister Margaret Mary was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, when suddenly she felt wholly overpowered by the Divine Presence. Let us hear her relate herself this episode of incomparable grandeur: "I lost all thought of myself and of the place where I was, and abandoned myself to the Divine Spirit, yielding up my heart to the power of His love. He made me repose for a long time upon His Sacred Breast, where He discovered to me the marvels of His love, and the inexplicable secrets of His Sacred Heart, which He had up to this time concealed from me. He opened to me now for the first time His Divine Heart, in a manner so real and sensible, that He left me no room for doubt, by reason of the effects which this favour produced in me, being fearful as I always am of deceiving myself in anything that I say regarding what passes within me. The following is, as it seems to me, the manner in which it took place: 'My Divine Heart,' He said, 'is so inflamed with love for men, and for thee in particular, that being unable any longer to contain within Itself the flames of Its burning charity, It must needs spread them abroad by thy means, and manifest Itself to them in order to enrich them with the precious treasures

which I discover to thee, and which contain graces of sanctification and salvation necessary to withdraw them from the abyss of perdition. I have chosen thee, as an abyss of unworthiness and ignorance, for the accomplishment of this great design, in order that everything may be done by Me.'

" After this He asked me for my heart, which I begged Him to take. This He did and placed it in His own Adorable Heart, where He showed it to me as a little atom which was being consumed in this great furnace, and withdrawing it thence as a burning flame in the form of a heart, He restored it to the place whence He had taken it, saying to me : ' See My well-beloved, I give thee a precious token of My love ; I have enclosed within thy side a little spark of the vivid flames of that love to serve thee for a heart and to consume thee to the last moment of thy life ; its ardour will never be exhausted, and thou wilt be unable to find any relief, except some slight alleviation by bleeding. And even this remedy will bring thee more humiliation and suffering than solace. Therefore I will that thou ask for it with simplicity, both in order that thou mayest practise what is prescribed by the Rule, as also to give thee the consolation of shedding thy blood on the Cross of humiliations. Lastly, to leave thee a proof that the great favour I have granted thee is not imagination, and that it is the foundation of all those which I intend to confer upon thee, although I have closed the wound in thy side, the pain will always remain. If, hitherto, thou hast taken only the name of My slave, I now give thee that of the beloved disciple of My Sacred Heart.'

" After such a signal favour, which lasted for a long time, during which I did not know whether I was in heaven or upon earth, I remained for several days, as it were, on fire and inebriated with divine love, and so completely out of myself that I had to do myself violence in order to utter a word. The effort I had to

make in order to take part in recreation, or to take my food, was so great that it was all I could do to overcome myself, which was a cause of considerable humiliation to me. I was unable to sleep, because of the pain of the wound which is so precious to me ; it produces such heat within me, that it burns and consumes me. I also felt such a plenitude of God, that I could not explain myself to my Superioress, as I would have wished." [1]

Truly one can understand this ! What interior anguish must not a soul, so profoundly humble as was that of our Saint, have felt on finding herself obliged to make known such revelations ! She whose only ambition it was to see herself overwhelmed with scorn and injuries and who would at least have felt relieved had she been allowed to make a general Confession in the refectory, that she might thereby make known to all the corruption that she believed to be within her ; how could she now say that the King of heaven and earth had chosen her to reveal His love to the whole world ! . . . Was it not the result of her pride which made her believe that Our Lord had really spoken thus to her ! She abandoned, however, all these reflections to the mercy of obedience, and related the fact to Mother de Saumaise, who was ere long to be the confidante of other secrets still more extraordinary. The Heart of Jesus had not spoken for the last time to Margaret Mary. She is to behold It again, and it will come to pass that souls in the future will love to contemplate this Heart as she then saw and depicted It.

" The Divine Heart was represented to me," she says, " on a throne of fire and flame, shedding rays on every side, brighter than the sun and transparent as crystal. The Wound which He received upon the Cross appeared there visibly ; a crown of thorns encircled the Sacred Heart, and It was surmounted by a cross. These instruments of His Passion signified, as

[1] Autobiography, pp. 70, 71.

my Divine Master gave me to understand, that it was the unbounded love which He had for men which had been the source of all His sufferings ; that from the first moment of His Incarnation all these torments had been present to Him, and the Cross had been, so to say, planted in His Heart ; that from that moment He accepted all the pains and humiliations which His Sacred Humanity was to suffer during the course of His mortal life, and even the outrages to which His love for men would expose Him in the Blessed Sacrament till the end of the world."

" He afterwards gave me to understand that it was the great desire He had to be perfectly loved by men, that made Him form the design of disclosing to them His Sacred Heart, and of giving them in these latter times a last proof of His love, by proposing to them an object and a means so calculated to engage them to love Him, and to love Him solidly. He opened to them all the treasures of love, mercy and grace, of sanctification and salvation contained in that Heart, in order that all who should wish to pay, and procure for Him, all the honour and love they could, might be enriched to profusion with the divine treasures, of which It is the fruitful and inexhaustible source."

" He also assured me that He took a singular pleasure in being honoured under the figure of this Heart of flesh, the picture of Which He wished to be exposed in public 'in order,' He added, 'to touch the insensible hearts of men ' ; promising me that He would pour forth abundantly, over all those who should honour It, all the treasures of grace with which It is filled, and that wherever this picture should be exposed to be singularly honoured, it would draw down every sort of blessing. But what caused me a kind of torture, which I felt more keenly than all the pains of which I have spoken, was, when this amiable Heart was manifested to me with these words : ' I have a burning thirst to be honoured by men in the Blessed Sacrament, and I find

hardly anyone who strives, according to My desire, to allay this thirst by making Me some return of love.' "[1] This was too much for so loving a soul. The thought that Love Itself was not loved wounded her heart incessantly.

In 1674 the Servant of God, having been named Mistress of the Sisters of the Little Habit,[2] was no longer assistant in the infirmary. Her method of education was very simple. She strove to impress on these young souls a horror of vice and a love of virtue, and consequently to inspire them with the true love of God.

Kind and indulgent with regard to the faults of her little flock, everything was easily pardoned except untruths and tale-bearing, both of which were severely punished.[3] On several different occasions she was entrusted with the care of these children who went by the name of "*Our dear little sisters*," and although we do not know to what years the depositions of 1715 refer, nevertheless the witnesses all agree on the point,[4] that an angel of heaven could scarcely have inspired the little group of children with more veneration than did the humble Sister Margaret Mary; every little reward

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 243, 244.

[2] It is quite an erroneous idea that even at that time the name of "Pensionnaires" was given to the young ladies who were admitted into the Monastery in order that the germs of the vocation might be cultivated in them, and to whom a little religious habit was given. After a more or less prolonged stay in the house of God, which served as a preparation for the religious life, most of them entered the novitiate. It was not strictly speaking a school, in which instruction in worldly knowledge and science is one of the most important factors. These children were admitted in order that they might become gradually accustomed to the religious life, and not merely for the acquisition of the profane sciences. [3] Cf. I, p. 101.

[4] Process of 1715. Deposition of Sister Anne Alexis Guinet de Mareschalle and Françoise Angélique de Damas de Barney, of the Visitation of Paray, and of Sisters Marie Chevalier de Montrouan de St. Etienne, and Catherine Billet de St. Xavier, Ursulines of Paray.

which they received, such as pictures and rosaries, was carefully treasured by them as relics. They even begged to have some of their Mistress's hair. Marie Chevalier de Montrouan used, out of curiosity, to watch her when she was engaged in prayer, and would then run and call the other children that they too might see how their Saint prayed to God.

The same child remarked that her Mistress led a life of unexampled mortification, and said she had seen her do many heroic acts. Among others she once came unawares and found her sucking an ulcer on the foot of one of her little companions. All these children noticed something extraordinary in Sister Margaret Mary.

The fact was, that the will of God was everything to this holy soul. The Sun of the Sacred Heart had risen *as a giant* over her, and it was impossible for her *to withdraw from Its heat.*[1]

But this divine Sun was about to manifest Itself to her in a new light and with increased splendour; the Lord had truly planted His tabernacle upon a high place, and His chosen one was to ascend to dwell there with Him. *Quis ascendet in montem Domini? aut quis stabit in loco sancto ejus? Innocens manibus et mundo corde.*[2]

On the first Friday of each month Sister Margaret Mary was invited to a banquet of ineffable delights. "The Sacred Heart was represented to me as a resplendent sun, the burning rays of which fell vertically upon my heart, which was inflamed with a fire so vivid that it seemed as if it would reduce me to ashes. It was at these times especially that my Divine Master taught me what He required of me, and disclosed to me the secrets of His Heart. On one occasion, whilst the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, feeling wholly withdrawn within myself by an extraordinary recollection of

[1] Exultavit ut gigas. . . Nec est qui se abscondat a calore ejus. Ps. xviii, 6, 7.

[2] Ps. xxiii, 3, 4.

all my senses and powers, Jesus Christ, my sweet Master, presented Himself to me all resplendent with glory, His five Wounds shining like so many suns. Flames issued from every part of His Sacred Body, especially from His Adorable Bosom, Which resembled an open furnace, and disclosed to me His most amiable Heart, the living source of these flames. It was then that He discovered to me the ineffable marvels of His pure love, and showed me to what an excess He had loved men, from whom He received in return only ingratitude and contempt. 'I feel this more,' He said, 'than all I suffered in My Passion. If they would make Me some return for My love, I should think but little of all I have done for them, and should wish, were it possible, to suffer still more. But they entertain only coldness towards Me, and the sole return they make for all My eagerness to do them good, is to reject and treat Me with coldness. Do thou at least console Me as far as thou art able.' On my representing to Him my inability, 'This,' He replied, 'will enable thee to supply for all deficiencies.' And at the same time, His Divine Heart being opened, there issued from It a flame so intense that I thought I should have been consumed, for I was wholly penetrated with it, and being no longer able to bear it, I besought Him to have pity on my weakness. 'I will be thy strength,' He said to me; 'fear nothing but be attentive to My voice and to what I shall require of thee, that thou mayest be in the requisite dispositions for the accomplishment of My designs. In the first place thou shalt receive Me in Holy Communion as often as obedience will permit thee, whatever mortification or humiliation it may cause thee, and which thou must take as pledges of My love. Thou shalt, moreover, communicate on the First Friday of each month. Every night between Thursday and Friday, I will make thee share in the overwhelming sadness which I was pleased to feel in the Garden of Olives; and this sadness shall reduce thee to an agony

harder to endure than death itself. In order to bear Me company in the humble prayer that I offered at that time to My Father in the midst of My anguish, thou shalt rise between eleven o'clock and midnight, and remain prostrate with Me for an hour, not only to appease the divine anger by begging mercy for sinners, but also to mitigate in some way the bitterness which I felt at that time on finding Myself abandoned by My apostles, which obliged Me to reproach them for not being able to watch one hour with Me.[1] During this hour thou shalt do what I shall teach thee. But listen, My daughter, believe not lightly, trust not every spirit; for Satan is enraged and will seek to deceive thee. Do nothing, therefore, without the approval of those who guide thee; being thus under the authority of obedience, his efforts will be in vain, for he has no power over the obedient."[2] With her habitual simplicity Saint Margaret Mary continues: "During the whole of this vision I lost all consciousness and no longer knew where I was. When they came to withdraw me, seeing that I could make no reply, nor even support myself except with great difficulty, they led me to our Mother. On seeing me thus completely, as it were, beside myself, all burning and trembling on my knees before her, she mortified and humbled me to the utmost of her power, which pleased and filled me with incredible joy, for I felt so great a criminal, and was so filled with confusion, that however rigorously I might have been treated, all

[1] Such is the origin of the Holy Hour, which may truly be said to have been instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who asked it of His servant in this celebrated apparition. Understood and practised in the manner shown by Our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary, the Holy Hour is now a flourishing Archconfraternity enriched with precious indulgences, the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial being its centre.

A Brief of His Holiness Pius X., of March 27, 1911, granted it the exceptional privilege of affiliating with itself all other confraternities of the same name.

[2] Autobiography, pp. 71-73.

would have appeared to me too mild. After I had told her, though with extreme confusion, what had taken place, she proceeded to humble me still more, and refused to allow me, for the present, anything of what I believed Our Lord had asked me to do, regarding only with contempt all that I told her. This consoled me greatly, and I withdrew in peace." She then continues: "And the fire which consumed me threw me into a burning fever, but I felt too great pleasure in suffering to utter any complaint, nor did I say anything about it until compelled to do so by weakness, so that the doctor[1] declared that I had been suffering a long time from the fever of which I had over sixty more attacks. Never did I feel such consolation, for my body suffered extreme pain. This slightly relieved the burning thirst I had for suffering, for that devouring fire could only be fed with the fuel of the Cross; that is to say with suffering, pain, contempt and humiliations of every kind, and I never experienced any suffering which equalled that which I felt at not suffering enough. It was thought that I should die therefrom."[2]

But He Who is Life Itself did not permit her to die; the three Divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity deigned to visit her, and filled her soul with inexpressible consolation. "It appeared to me that the Eternal Father, presenting me with a great cross beset with thorns, and surrounded with the various instruments of the Passion, said to me: 'See, My daughter, I make thee the same present which I made to My Beloved Son.' 'And I,' said Our Lord Jesus Christ, 'I will fasten thee to the cross as I, Myself, was fastened to it, and will bear thee faithful company.' The third adorable Person then said, that, being Love Itself, He would consume while purifying me thereon. My soul was filled with unutterable peace and joy, and the impression made upon it by these three Divine Persons has never been effaced."[3]

[1] This was Dr. William Billet, who held Saint Margaret Mary in great veneration.

[2] Autobiography, p. 74.

[3] *Ibid*, pp. 74, 75.

Nevertheless, Sister Margaret Mary was continually ill, and her desire for Holy Communion became so intense that had she been obliged to walk barefoot along a path of flames, this pain would have been nothing to her in comparison with the grief she felt at being deprived of the Bread of Life.

One day, despite her extreme weakness, she felt interiorly urged to go to the choir in order to communicate, although she would have been unable to do so unless He, Who attracted her, became Himself her support. "It seemed to me that He touched me with His Hand and said: 'What dost thou fear, O daughter of little faith? Arise, come and find Me.'" These words filled her with joy, and she rose without telling the infirmarian. The latter, regardless of her assurances, insisted upon her returning immediately to bed. "Our Mother," writes the humble Sister, "reproved me for the attachment I had to my own will. I did did not tell her the reason, fearing that she would regard as reality, what might possibly have only been imagination."[1] Be that as it may, Mother de Saumaise ordered her to ask Our Lord to restore her to health.

She obeyed, although with fear lest her prayer should be heard; she was, however, told that her recovery would be considered as a sign that what was passing within her was the work of the Spirit of God. If Our Lord cured her, she would be allowed to do as He commanded, both as regarded Holy Communion on the First Friday of the month, and the Holy Hour during the night between Thursday and Friday. In obedience, therefore, she laid all this before Our Lord. "I did not fail to recover my health immediately," she adds, as though it were an understood thing. Did she not already know the Heart of Jesus well enough to be sure of Him? On this occasion, however, Our Lord

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 151, 152. Cf. I, p. 114.

willed to leave to His Holy Mother the pleasure of curing His beloved daughter, for the Immaculate Virgin appeared to Sister Margaret Mary, and bestowing upon her many caresses, conversed with her for a long time. "Take courage, my daughter," she said, "in the health which I restore to thee, at the will of my Divine Son, for thou hast yet a long and painful way to go, always upon the Cross, pierced with nails and thorns, and torn with scourges. But fear nothing, I will not abandon thee, and I promise thee my protection." [1]

A soul raised to such a degree of union with God, might indeed expect that He, Who overwhelmed her with graces without measure, should show Himself a jealous God.

On one occasion, when she had committed some slight fault, her Divine Master said to her: "Know that I am a holy Master, and One that teaches holiness. I am pure, and cannot suffer the smallest stain. Thou must therefore act in simplicity of heart, with a pure and upright intention in My presence. I cannot suffer the least want of straightforwardness, and I will make thee know that the excess of My love has led Me to make Myself thy Master, so as to teach and fashion thee according to My will and designs; that I cannot endure tepid souls, and if I am gentle in supporting thy weakness, I shall not be less severe and exact in correcting and punishing thy infidelities." [2]

On another occasion, Sister Margaret Mary having given way to a slight movement of vanity in speaking of herself: "O my God," she says, "what tears and groans this fault has caused me, for as soon as we were alone He called me to account in the following manner, and said with a look of severity: 'What hast thou to boast of, O dust and ashes, since of thyself thou art but an abyss of nothingness and misery, of which thou shouldst never lose sight! In order that the greatness

[1] Autobiography, p. 75. [2] *Ibid*, pp. 67, 68.

of My gifts may not lead thee to forget what thou art, I will set before thee thy portrait.' " These words were fulfilled on the spot ; the God of all purity placed before her a picture which vividly represented the state of her soul, the horrible sight of which so troubled her that she could not have endured it, had she not been sustained by the Beloved of her soul, to Whom she cried out in supplication : " Alas, O my God, let me die or withdraw this from me !" [1]

The Lord has said : " *My thoughts are not your thoughts ; nor your ways My ways.*" [2] And in very truth He had a way of acting towards His faithful servant, the mystery of which we can scarcely comprehend. She thus explains it : " This only Good of my soul never deprives me of His divine presence, no matter how great my faults may be. But whenever I have had the misfortune to displease Him in any way, He makes it so terrible to me that there is no torment which would not be sweeter, and to which I would not immolate myself a thousand times, rather than bear this divine presence and appear before the sanctity of God with my soul sullied by sin. I would have wished at such times to escape and hide myself, were it possible, but all my efforts were in vain, for everywhere I found that from which I sought to flee, together with such terrible torments that I seemed to be in purgatory, since everything in me suffered without consolation, nor the desire of seeking any. This made me sometimes say in the bitter anguish of my soul : ' O how terrible it is to fall into the hands of a living God ! ' " [3]

But could she complain ? Had not Our Lord Himself foretold to her, that He would be at the same time *her joy and her torment?* [4]

On another occasion Our Lord addressed to her the

[1] Autobiography, p. 76.

[2] Non enim cogitationes meæ cogitationes vestræ ; neque viæ vestræ, viæ meæ, dicit Dominus. Isaias lv, 8.

[3] Autobiography, p. 118. [4] Supra, p. 42.

following question: "My daughter, wilt thou give Me thy heart, therein to rest My suffering love, which everyone despises?" "My Lord," she replied, "Thou knowest that I am wholly Thine, do with me according to Thy desire." Upon which He continued: "Dost thou know to what end I give thee My graces in such abundance? It is to make of thee a sanctuary in which the fire of My love may continually burn. Thy heart is like to a sacred altar, which nothing sullied can touch; I have chosen it in order to offer holocausts thereon to My Eternal Father."[1]

How many times could not Margaret Mary have quoted the words of her sainted Father St. Francis of Sales: "If jealousy could reign in the kingdom of eternal love, the Angels would envy the suffering of God for man, and of man for God." But she certainly did not expect to see Angels themselves come to prove to her the truth of this statement. One day when the Community was engaged in preparing flax, she retired, as was her wont, to a little courtyard near the nuns' choir, so as to be nearer to the Blessed Sacrament. Many graces had been granted to her by Our Lord on that spot. The Sisters sometimes reproached her for going there so often, and according to her own expression, "with great imprudence," she had replied that she would not return again. But the attraction was so great that it drew her once more to this little nook, where she experienced something of the joys of Paradise. Being troubled at not having kept her word, she went to accuse herself of it to the Mother Superior who reassured her by saying that she must not fail to follow her attraction. Margaret Mary therefore returned, and while continuing to work on her knees, she felt herself wholly wrapt in interior recollection.[2] "Then the Adorable Heart of my Jesus," she writes, "was presented to me brighter than the sun. It was surrounded by the flames of His pure love, and encircled by Sera-

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 145. Cf. I, p. 112. [2] *Ibid*, II, p. 167

phim, who sang in marvellous harmony: 'Love exults, Love rejoices, the Love of the Sacred Heart gives joy.'"[1] (L'amour triomphe, l'amour jouit, l'amour du Sacré Cœur réjouit). These Blessed Spirits invited her to unite with them in praising the Heart of Jesus; but, filled with the sense of her unworthiness, she did not dare to do so. The Seraphim chided her for this, saying that they had come to form an association with her, whereby to pay a continual homage of love, adoration and praise to this Divine Heart. They added: "that in order to do this they would take my place before the Blessed Sacrament," she writes, "so that I might be able by their means to love It continually; and that, as they would participate in my love and suffer in my person, I too should rejoice in and with them. At the same time they wrote this association in the Sacred Heart, in letters of gold and in indelible characters of love."[2] This vision lasted from two to three hours, and from this time forth, whenever Margaret Mary invoked the holy Angels, she always addressed them as her "*divine associates*."[3] She owns that she felt the effects of this union with the Seraphim to the end of her life.

Her love of the Sacred Heart grew ever more and more. Nevertheless, when she was before the Blessed Sacrament, enjoying the presence and the divine caresses of her Well-Beloved, if summoned elsewhere by obedience, she left without resistance. It mattered

[1] Autobiography, p. 109. Life and Writings I, p. 197.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 109.

[3] The little court, where this apparition took place, is now known as *The Court of the Blessed Sacrament or the Court of the Seraphim*; the steps on which the holy Sister was kneeling during the vision are still in good preservation. The remaining principal apparitions concerning the devotion and worship of the Sacred Heart took place in the chapel, that is to say, whilst Sister Margaret Mary was in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling behind the grating in the nuns' choir. On some of these occasions the Blessed Sacrament was, at the time, exposed on the altar.

little to her whether she was occupied with this or with that, provided she did the will of her God, and was engaged in loving Him.

The following is a further proof of this: "I often begged Our Lord that my heart might remain in His presence. He said to me as I was making my genuflexion before leaving: 'Thou art, then, going without thy heart, since it is never more to quit this place? I will fill it with a precious balm, which will keep alive in it the fire of My love. Good-will shall be the wick which must never burn away; and whatsoever with the help of My grace thou doest or sufferest, thou must place in My Heart, to be changed into this precious balm, which shall serve as the oil of this lamp, so that all may be consumed by the fire of divine love.' I endeavoured to do as He taught me. 'My daughter,' He said to me, 'I take such pleasure in seeing thy heart, that I wish to put Myself in its place and to serve as thy heart.' This He did in so perceptible a manner that it was impossible to have any doubt about it. Since that time His goodness gives me such free access to His Divine Majesty that words fail me to express it. 'Hast thou been a loser by the exchange which thou hast made with Me in giving Me all?' Our Lord said to me. 'Be careful only to keep thy lamp filled and I will kindle the fire.'"[1]

Ever since Margaret Mary had been miraculously cured after the vision relating to the Holy Hour, Mother de Saumaise no longer doubted the truth of the celestial communications made to her favoured daughter.

Feeling, however, embarrassed as to the best way to guide her in the eminent paths to which she was called, the prudent Superior deemed it expedient that what was passing in her soul should be examined by some persons of solid doctrine. She therefore arranged that Margaret Mary should speak with several directors. *Who* these directors were, is not known, as no docu-

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 117. Cf. II, p. 154.

ments are extant in which their names are recorded. One thing, however, is certain, viz., the result of these discussions ; for, far from enlightening the Servant of God, they regarded her as a visionary, forbade her to follow her inspirations, and, in a word, caused her intense anguish. Mgr. Languet has immortalized, in a realistic sentence, one of these sentences unanimously pronounced by the judges of this innocent victim. They ordered her to be "*fed on broth.*"[1] Humiliation and derision were nothing to her, for it was beyond her power to resist the sweet and blessed violence made her by her only Love. She was forced to follow Him whither He led her, independently of all creatures.

It would be impossible to describe the state into which the poor Sister was then plunged. In the midst of these mental perplexities she had recourse, as was her wont, to her Divine Master Who sustained and encouraged her with the assurance that He would send her "a Servant of His,"[2] to whom He willed that she should make known all she knew concerning the treasures and secrets of the Sacred Heart ; for it was he who was to reassure her regarding her interior way. It was not long before the prediction met with its fulfilment.

In the beginning of the year 1675, Father de la Colombière was sent to Paray as Superior of the residence of the Jesuit Fathers in that town. He was a man of eminent distinction, a perfect Religious, and gifted with a remarkable discernment of spirits. Born, February 2, 1641, at Saint Symphorien d'Ozon, in Dauphiny, Claude de la Colombière entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Avignon, October 25, 1658. In 1660 he made his first vows, and was ordained priest in 1669 ; in 1674 he made his "third year" at Lyons, and was professed February 2, 1675. This young

[1] Life of the Ven. Mother Margaret Mary, p. 124, by Mgr. Lanuet.

[2] Atobogruphy, 92.

Jesuit had already a history of his own, having been tutor to Colbert's two sons, even before he was a priest, and had consequently mixed in the highest society. But God had destined him for something greater, and on that account, at the hour appointed by Providence, had guided him to Paray.

The first time that Father de la Colombière saw the Community of Paray, Margaret Mary heard interiorly these words : " *This is he whom I send thee.*" [1]

Shortly afterwards, when hearing the extraordinary Confessions of the Sisters, Father de la Colombière retained Sister Alacoque for about an hour, speaking to her as if he understood all that was passing in her mind, although she did not in any way open her heart to him on that occasion. On the contrary, always humble and reserved, she withdrew without having made known to him the extraordinary favours she had received from God.

Father de la Colombière asked if she would consent to his coming again to speak with her in the confessional, to which she replied, that not being at her own disposal, she would do whatever obedience ordered her to do.

Shortly after, when giving a spiritual conference to the Community, Father de la Colombière was particularly struck with Sister Margaret Mary, whom he singled out from amongst all the other Sisters. After the sermon he asked Mother de Saumaise to tell him who that young Religious was, whom he had noticed in the place which he described. On being told by the Mother Superior who it was, he assured her that she was a chosen soul. [2] Having requested the Father to return, Mother de Saumaise ordered Margaret Mary to speak with him.

The Servant of God thus relates her dispositions on this occasion : " I felt an extreme repugnance at being obliged to go, which I told him at once. He replied that he was very glad to have given me an opportunity

[1] Autobiography, p. 92. [2] Life and Writings I, p. 133.

of making a sacrifice to God. Then, without pain or trouble, I opened my heart and made known to him the depths of my soul, both good and bad ; whereupon he greatly consoled me, assuring me that there was nothing to fear in the guidance of that Spirit, since It did not withdraw me from obedience ; that I ought to follow Its movements, abandoning to It my whole being, sacrificing and immolating myself according to Its good pleasure. He expressed his admiration at the goodness of God in not having been repelled by so much resistance on my part. He taught me to value the gifts of God, and to receive with respect and humility the frequent communications and familiar converse with which He favoured me ; adding, that I ought to be in a continual state of thanksgiving towards such infinite goodness." [1]

Nothing can be more supernatural than the attitude of these two souls in the presence of each other. In order to obey, the penitent exposes the extraordinary effects of grace in her soul ; the Religious, on his part, admires the workings of God, and yet, what does he tell her ? *That in all this, she has great reason to humble herself.*

It was thus that he sanctioned the most imperious necessity she had ever experienced ; and at the same time consolidated the peace which God had just established within her. Practical details were also entered into. Was she, for instance, to continue to do herself violence in order to pray vocally at such times when her soul was absorbed in God ? Experienced in the highest spiritual matters, her wise director ordered her to confine herself to the vocal prayers of obligation, adding the Rosary when she was able ; this was all that was necessary in the path along which God was leading her.

Sister Margaret Mary also mentioned to Father de la Colombière her trouble concerning the letters and notes which she was urged by grace to write to certain per-

[1] Autobiography, p. 93.

sons, and which were the cause of many humiliations for her. The answer of the Servant of God was no less precise. He told her that no matter what pain or humiliation she might have to undergo, she was never to desist from following the movements of the Holy Spirit, but to write simply all that He dictated to her. She was then to hand the note to her Mother Superior, who would do with it as she thought fit. Such a direction, drawn from the most pure source of the Spirit of God, could have been suggested by grace alone.

Not content with setting his holy daughter at ease, Father de la Colombière reassured Mother de Saumaise, so that for both one and the other his experience and advice proved a providential help at a most critical moment.

It was decreed, however, that the disciple of the Heart of Jesus should never have any consolation save such as was accompanied by the Cross. This first long interview with the new Superior, as well as those which followed, drew down upon her fresh humiliations and new trials. They can be imagined without its being necessary to enter into details.

It was impossible for her to avoid overhearing some of the reflections which were made about her, the least cutting of which was, that she wished to deceive him also by her illusions, as she had already deceived so many others. "He himself had as much to suffer on my account," she writes, "but this did not in any way trouble him."[1]

Such are the Saints! Provided God is satisfied, it matters little to them what men may think or say. On the other hand, the Heart of Jesus was about to recompense both the one and the other in a divine manner. One day when Father de la Colombière was saying Mass in the chapel of the Monastery, Our Lord granted signal graces both to him and to Margaret Mary. As the latter approached to receive Holy Communion, Our

[1] Autobiography, p. 94.

Lord showed her His Divine Heart as a burning furnace. She saw at the same time two hearts on the point of uniting themselves to It, and being absorbed therein. At the same time she heard these words: "It is thus that My pure love unites these three hearts for ever." Our Lord again told her to reveal to His servant the treasures of His Adorable Heart, in order that he might spread them abroad, making known to others their value and utility. In words of charming simplicity the Saint says: "He wished that we should be as brother and sister, sharing equally these spiritual treasures," but in her humility she could with difficulty understand this, seeing only the inequality which existed between a man of such great virtue and a poor wretched sinner like herself. But Our Lord enlightened her, saying: "The infinite riches of My Heart will supply and equalise everything. Tell him this without fear." In their first interview, therefore, she related everything to him. "The profound humility and gratitude with which he received this and several other things concerning himself, which I told him in the name of my Sovereign Master, touched me so much, that I profited more by it than I should have done by all the sermons I might have heard."[1]

Like Margaret Mary, Father de la Colombière was now ready! The hour had arrived for the last of the great revelations, and the saintly Jesuit was about to receive his share of the inheritance of the Sacred Heart.

It is on bended knee that it behoves one to hearken to the narration of this great apparition of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to His servant. It must be regarded as an historical fact, for it announces a new era in the Church of God.

In the year 1675, the Feast of Corpus Christi fell on June 13, and the octave continued to June 20, inclusively.

"Being before the Blessed Sacrament," writes Saint

[1] Autobiography, pp. 94, 95.

Margaret Mary, " one day of its octave, (un jour de son octave)[1] I felt urged to make Him some return by giving Him back love for love; ' Thou canst not make Me any greater return for love,' He said, ' than by doing what I have so often asked of thee!' And discovering to me His Divine Heart: ' See this Heart,' He said, ' Which has loved men so much that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify to them Its love; and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude, by reason of the contempt, irreverence, sacrilege and coldness which they show Me in this Sacrament of Love. But what I feel most is, that they are hearts which are consecrated to Me that treat Me thus. Therefore, I ask of thee that the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi be set apart for a special Feast to honour My Heart, by communicating on that day and making reparation to It by a solemn act, in order to make amends for the indignities which It has received during the time It has been exposed upon the altar. I also promise thee that My Heart shall expand Itself to shed in abundance the influence of Its divine love upon all who shall thus honour It, and cause It to be honoured.' And when I replied that I knew not how to accomplish what He had so long desired of me, He told me to address myself to His servant, whom He had sent to me for the accomplishment of this design. Having done this, he (Father de la Colombière) ordered me to commit to writing all that I had made known to him concerning the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as several other things which referred to It, for the greater glory of God."[2]

In the " Autobiography," the narrative ceases here,

[1] She specifies no more. How is this expression to be understood, *one day of its octave?* Does she mean the *octave day* or a day *during* the octave? No one can tell, but although the precise date is unknown, it is certain that the apparition must have taken place between the 13th and 20th of June, 1675.

[2] Autobiography, pp. 103, 104.

but if we open the "Retreat of Father de la Colombière," we shall find the sequel, for we know that Saint Margaret Mary had given him a complete account of her vision; what follows is therefore the continuation of the admirable colloquy which took place between the Heart of Jesus and Its beloved disciple. "But to whom, Lord, dost Thou address Thyself?" she said to Him, "to a poor creature and so wretched a sinner, that her unworthiness even would be capable of hindering the accomplishment of Thy design; Thou hast so many generous souls to execute Thy wishes." "What! dost thou not know," said Our Divine Saviour, "that I make use of the weakest instruments to confound the strongest, and that it is on the humble and the poor of spirit that My power generally manifests itself with the greatest splendour, in order that they may attribute nothing to themselves?" "Do Thou, then, give me the means," she replied, "of doing what Thou commandest." Upon this Our Lord added: "Address thyself to My servant (Father de la Colombière), and tell him from Me to do his utmost to establish this devotion, and give this pleasure to My Divine Heart. Let him not be discouraged at the difficulties he will meet with, for there will be no lack of them; but he must remember that those are all-powerful who distrust themselves, and place their whole confidence in Me."[1]

Father de la Colombière was not a man to believe lightly everything that was told him; but he had under his eyes too many striking proofs of the steadfast virtue of Sister Margaret Mary, to fear the least illusion in what she transmitted to him.

Filled with a holy pride and a humble gratitude for the mission which the Heart of Our Saviour had reserved for him, the fervent Jesuit determined to begin

[1] Such is the text of the original "Spiritual Retreat" of Father Claude de la Colombière, published for the first time in 1684, pp. 249-251. It is the one usually quoted by contemporaries. Life and Writings I, pp. 137, 138.

by establishing the reign of the Sacred Heart in himself. He therefore dedicated and consecrated himself to It, with all the fervour and love of which his soul was capable. He made this consecration on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, and doubtless, hidden within the walls of her Monastery, the Servant of God united herself to the solemn though private act of her venerated director. What must have been the consolation of the Heart of Jesus at the unreserved offering of these two devoted souls, whom He could consider as the two first conquests of His Sacred Heart in Paray-le-Monial.

According to the testimony of the virtuous Sister, Father de la Colombière gave her his assistance, not only during the short time he remained at Paray, but afterwards as well. "I have often been astonished," she remarks, "that he did not abandon me as others had done, for the manner in which I acted towards him would have repelled anyone else; nevertheless, he let no opportunity pass of humbling and mortifying me, and this gave me great pleasure." [1]

It must not for a moment be supposed that Saint Margaret Mary was occupied solely with her own personal interests, she was above all deeply attached to Holy Church, and her prayers were catholic in the truest sense of the word, for they included all without exception. The following will serve as an example. Upon the opening of the Jubilee, [2] Our Lord, with the severity

[1] Autobiography, p. 94.

[2] Until the present time it has been supposed, though without sufficient proofs, that the Jubilee here alluded to was that granted by Pope Innocent XI in 1681 and celebrated in the diocese of Autun from the 10th to the 24th of May, 1682. Perhaps the supposition rested on this sentence of Saint Margaret Mary "that it was not so much *against the infidels* that His justice was irritated," this Jubilee having been principally granted with a view of fighting with the arms of prayer and penance against the Turks. But, firstly, for some time past the Mussulmans had been afflicting the Church, and the Bull of Clement X. *ad apostolicæ vocis oraculum* dated April 16, 1674,

of a judge, gave her to understand that His justice was less irritated against the infidels than against His "chosen people" who had rebelled against Him. Being filled with anguish on hearing this, the humble Sister redoubled her prayers for sinners, and her ardour was stimulated still more by the following words from the lips of Our Lord Himself: "One just soul can obtain pardon for thousands of criminals." "But," He continued, "weep and sigh unceasingly, because My Blood has been shed in vain for so many souls, who abuse It to so great an extent in these Indulgences, that they are satisfied with cutting off the weeds which grow in their hearts, without striving to uproot them. But woe to those souls who remain defiled and parched in the midst of the very source of living waters, for they shall never be purified nor relieved of their thirst." "My Lord and my God," she replied, fixing her eyes on His Sacred Heart, "it is *here* that Thy mercy must place all these faithless souls in order that

whilst announcing the Jubilee of the Holy Year 1675, mentions the "barbarians who menace the illustrious Kingdom of Poland, and other Christian countries, both by land and water. *Vertite arma in immanes Barbaros inclyto Poloniæ regno, aliisque Christianis provinciis, terra marisque imminentes.*" Secondly, by a careful examination of one of the most ancient manuscripts of Paray, we are led to conclude that the graces of which Saint Margaret Mary speaks, and which she received during the time of the Jubilee, are included in the "*Writings*" ordered by Mother de Saumaise, for she concludes the passage in question with these words: "Although it is with repugnance, I, nevertheless, do not desist from writing down in obedience the graces with which my God favoured me, during the third and fourth years of my religious life." This brings us exactly to the years 1675-1676. Now according to the usual custom, the Jubilee of the Holy Year, which was celebrated in Rome 1675, was extended to the Christian world in the following year. Thirdly, it is also worthy of note, that the text reads: "Upon the opening of *the Jubilee*" and not "*a Jubilee.*" In writing thus she seems rather to allude to the ordinary Jubilee of the Holy Year.

These different reasons have decided us to place the instructions she received, during the Jubilee of the years 1675-1676, until some positive proof shows that they refer to another period.

they may be justified, and thereby glorify Thee eternally." "Yes, I will do so, if thou wilt promise Me on their part perfect amendment." "But, Thou knowest well, O my God, that this is not in my power, unless Thou Thyself effect it by rendering efficacious the merits of Thy Passion."

Thereupon He instructed her as to what she was to do during this Jubilee. She was to offer to the Eternal Father the superabundant satisfaction which His Son made on the Cross for the conversion of sinners; the ardent love of His Sacred Heart in satisfaction for the tepidity and lukewarmness of His chosen people; and lastly, the submission of His adorable will to that of His Father, in order that His merits might obtain the full accomplishment thereof.[1]

With regard to Margaret Mary herself, the divine will was about to withdraw the support which heaven had sent her, in the person of Father de la Colombière.

At the end of September 1676, he ceased to be Superior at Paray, and left for England, whither he had been sent as Chaplain to the Duchess of York, Marie Beatrice d'Este. Although his departure had been revealed to Sister Margaret Mary, she felt it none the less keenly. But her Divine Master did not allow her to reflect long upon it: "What! am I not sufficient for thee?" He said, "I, Who am thy beginning and thy last end!"[2]

This sufficed for her to abandon herself entirely to her Lord. Before his departure from Paray, Father de la Colombière drew up, in a few words, his instructions as to the line of conduct which he judged the most suitable to the necessities of Sister Margaret Mary, and left her the following counsels: "Remember that God asks of you everything, and nothing. He asks everything, because He wishes to reign over you and in you, as in a centre which belongs wholly to Him, so that He may dispose of all, finding nothing to resist Him, but

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 105, 106. Cf. II, p. 144.
[2] Autobiography, p. 104.

everything bending to and obeying the least sign of His will. He asks nothing of you, because He wishes to do everything in you, without your interfering in anything, contenting yourself with being the subject on which and in which He acts, in order that all the glory may be His, and that He alone may be known, praised and loved for ever." [1]

On his part, the saintly Religious accepted from his penitent a note written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and containing the three following sentences: "(1) The gift of Father de la Colombière is to lead souls to God, for which reason the devils will exert all their efforts against him. Even persons consecrated to God will give him trouble, disapproving of what he says in his sermons, with the intention of leading them to God; but in these crosses the goodness of God will be his stay, in proportion as he continues to place his trust in Him.

"(2) He must have compassionate gentleness for sinners, and employ severity only then, when God shall make known to him that such is His will.

"(3) Let him be very careful not to draw good away from its source. This is a brief saying, but it contains a great deal which God will enable him to understand according to the application he bestows upon it." [2]

This memorandum was carefully preserved by Father de la Colombière, and before long he understood that it was prophetic. A feeling of gratitude had profoundly attached the Monastery of Paray to this eminent Religious, and after his arrival in England, he kept up a correspondence with Mother de Saumaise. A few quotations from his letters will not be out of place in this present work. On November 20, 1676, he writes from London: "We do not meet here with the Daugh-

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 149.

[2] Spiritual Retreat of Father Claude de la Colombière. Edition of 1684 pp. 223-224. Contemporaries quote the same, but with a few unimportant variations. Life and Writings I, p. 140.

ters of Holy Mary, and much less with a Sister Alacoque ; but God is to be found wherever we seek Him, and He claims our love no less in London than in Paray. I thank Him with all my heart for the favour He confers upon me in permitting me to be remembered by that saintly Religious. I doubt not that her prayers draw down spiritual graces upon me ; but I fear much that I do not profit by them as I ought ; I will endeavour to utilize the written advice you give me, especially that which you say was confirmed during her last retreat." [1] Again, on February 17, 1677 : " You will be glad to hear that the note which you gave me at my departure contained almost as many mysteries as words. I did not understand their meaning until during my retreat ten days ago ; but it is true Our Lord had left nothing undone, and had provided me with preservatives against any evil which might overtake me. All has been verified with the exception of the persecution alluded to in the first point, which a person consecrated to God was to raise against me. For as regards those with which the devil was to assail me, there is truly no kind of snare that he has not laid for me. The second and third points were of the greatest importance for my peace and perfection. I thought at first, and continued to do so for three months, that they were only general instructions which were to extend over my whole life, but I have since had reason to believe that they were counsels intended for present occasions, and remedies against thoughts and plans which troubled me, and were decidedly opposed to those of God. The last point, especially, which I had never been able to understand, forced itself upon my mind with such lucidity that nothing could be more clear. . . It would take me too long to tell you all the treasures which I have discovered in this short ' Memo-

[1] Complete works VI, p. 326, note. In the " Life and Writings " Vol. I., by her contemporaries some words have been suppressed, pp. 141, 142.

randum.' All I can say is that, if it be the evil spirit who dictated it, he acts considerably against himself, since I have derived from it such help against his attacks, that it has produced in me all the effects which the Holy Spirit is wont to produce." [1]

In the journal of his " Retreat " the holy Jesuit is still more explicit. " On the fifth day," he writes, " if I am not mistaken, God gave me to understand the meaning of this point of the ' Memorandum,' which I brought with me from France. ' *Let him have a great care not to draw good away from its source. This is a brief saying, but it contains a great deal which God will enable him to understand, according to the application he bestows upon it.*' It is true that I had often examined the expression ' *to draw good away from its source*' without being able to understand it. To-day, having noted that God would enable me to understand it according to the way I should apply my mind to it, I meditated for a considerable time upon it, without discovering any other meaning than that I should refer to God all the good He was pleased to do by my means, since He is the sole source thereof. But after having, with difficulty, turned my thoughts aside from this consideration, my mind was suddenly enlightened, and I saw clearly that it supplied the solution of a doubt which had troubled me during the first two or three days of my retreat, with regard to the manner in which I should employ the money I received for my pension. I understood that this expression comprises very much, for it leads to the perfection of poverty, to a great detachment from all vain glory, to the perfect observance of the Rule, and that it is the source of peace, both interior and exterior." [2]

All that Saint Margaret Mary sent to him in writing was regarded by Father de la Colombière as so many

[1] Complete works VI., pp. 333-334.

[2] Spiritual Retreat of Father de la Colombière, 1684, pp. 231-233. Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 140, 141.

oracles from heaven, and he did not judge amiss. Of this, both he and Mother de Saumaise had before long a striking proof, of which the following account is given by the latter. She relates that the crosses and interior sufferings Father de la Colombière was enduring in England, had been made known to Sister Margaret Mary, " which she came to tell us," continues the former Superioress of Paray, " handing a note for him, which contained some very consoling words that Jesus Christ had dictated to her. On receiving letters shortly after from this great Servant of God, I knew by his urgent request that he was in need of prayers. Thinking that it might possibly have something to do with what had been made known to this virtuous Sister, I decided to send him the said note which I copied without mentioning it to anyone. Nevertheless, she came to me, saying, that in copying I had changed something and that Our Lord wished it to be left as she had written it. On reading it over to see what I had changed, I found that I had substituted some words which, though practically the same, were, nevertheless, far less forcible. On receiving this note, Father de la Colombière assured me that it had come just at the right moment, and that he knew not what he would have done without it." [1]

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[1] Life and Writings I, p. 98.

CHAPTER IV

MORE SUFFERING AND MORE LOVE.

1677-1681

How could Margaret Mary have efficaciously fulfilled the office of Apostle of the Sacred Heart, if she had not first been Its victim? One day Our Lord presented Himself to her holding in each hand a picture. One represented the happiest possible life for a religious soul: peace, interior and exterior consolations, together with good health, and the esteem and applause of creatures. The other set before her "a life of poverty and abjection, passed in a state of constant crucifixion, by all kinds of humiliations and contempt, together with incessant suffering both of body and soul." "Choose, My daughter," said Our Lord, "whichever thou preferest; I will give thee the same graces with the one as with the other." In the ardour of her love she cast herself in adoration at His Sacred Feet, saying: "O my Lord, I wish for nothing but Thee, and the choice which Thou wilt make for me." But Our Saviour still pressed her to choose. "'Thou alone art sufficient to me, O my God, do for me whatever will glorify Thee most, having no regard either to my interest or satisfaction; it is enough for me to know that Thou art content!' Thereupon He said that, like Magdalen, I had chosen the better part, which should not be taken away from me, for He Himself would be my inheritance for ever. Then presenting me with the picture of the crucifixion, He said: 'Behold what I have chosen for thee; this it is which is most agreeable to Me, both as regards the accomplishment of My designs, and also to make thee

more like unto Myself. The other, being a life of enjoyment and not of merit, is reserved for eternity.' I forthwith accepted this picture of crucifixion and death, and kissed the hand which offered it to me; and although my whole being shuddered at the sight, I embraced it with all the affection of which I was capable. As I pressed it to my heart, I felt it so deeply imprinted upon me, that I seemed to be nothing else but a compound of all that I had seen represented therein." [1]

Upon another occasion, as she was meditating on Our Lord hanging upon the Cross, He drew her powerfully to Himself, saying: "Receive, My daughter, the Cross which I give thee, and imprint it upon thy heart. Keep it ever before thine eyes, and carry it in thy arms. The rigorous torments which it will cause thee to suffer will be unknown to others and continual: a hunger, which cannot be satisfied; a thirst which cannot be quenched; and a burning heat for which there will be no relief." Not being able to understand these words I said to Him: 'O my God, enlighten my intelligence, that I may know what Thou wouldst have me to do!' 'To have the Cross in thy heart,' He replied, 'means that everything therein must be crucified; to keep it ever before thine eyes, means that thou must be crucified in all things; to carry it in thy arms, means that thou must embrace it lovingly each time it presents itself to thee, as being the most precious token of My love that I can give thee in this life. This continual hunger for suffering will be in honour of that which I had to suffer for the glory of My Eternal Father; the thirst for Me and for the salvation of souls will be in memory of the thirst I suffered on the tree of the Cross.'" [2]

There are often actions in the lives of the Saints

[1] Autobiography, pp. 79, 80.
[2] Life and Writings II, p. 156. Cf. I, pp. 115, 116.

which appear extravagant. They are, however, merely the effects of their love for God, which ravishes them, so to say, out of themselves. Such were the transports of divine love which at times urged Margaret Mary to seeming excesses of mortification.

Two examples have remained more especially characteristic, and surpass by far anything one could imagine. At that time the humble Sister was again assistant in the infirmary. "I was so excessively dainty (si douillette)," she writes, "that the least want of cleanliness caused me to vomit." There is nothing astonishing, it may be said, in that; nevertheless, it must be remembered that the Sovereign Master is full of divine severity for His elect, and He reproached His generous disciple so severely for this instinctive movement of aversion, that, in order to punish herself, and without waiting to consult reason, she spontaneously swallowed what a sick Sister, whom she was tending, had just vomited. In this circumstance she was urged on by the impetuosity of her love for Our Lord, which made everything appear expedient to her. "Had I a thousand bodies, a thousand loves and a thousand lives, I would immolate them all to Thy service," she exclaimed to her Well-Beloved. It was not long ere Our Lord proved to her His satisfaction with this victory over self, as is evident by what follows: "I experienced such great delight in this action," she continues, "that I would have wished to meet with such opportunities every day, in order to learn how to conquer myself, and have God alone as witness; but His goodness, to which I owe the strength to overcome myself, was not long in showing me the pleasure which He too had taken in it, for the following night, if I am not mistaken, He held me for the space of two or three hours with my lips pressed to the Wound of His Sacred Heart. It would be difficult for me to express what I then felt, and what marvellous effects this grace produced in my heart and in my soul. But this suffices to

make known the great goodness and the mercy of my God towards so miserable an object." [1]

Shortly after she met with another occasion, still more incredible, of satisfying her desire of *learning how to overcome herself, having God alone as witness.*

Having once again given way to some slight repugnance whilst serving a sick Sister, Our Saviour renewed His interior reprimand, and with such authority, that anything appeared more endurable to Sister Margaret Mary than to have displeased her God, and she resolved to repair her fault there and then; to which end she performed an act so repulsive to nature that not only would no one have advised it, but no one would have even permitted her to do it. Our Lord Himself obliged His heroic servant to desist, saying: "Thou art indeed foolish to act thus!" [2] "I do it, my Divine Master," she replied, "in order to please Thee, and to win Thy Sacred Heart, Which I hope Thou wilt not refuse me. And Thou, O my Lord, what hast Thou not done to win the hearts of men, and yet they refuse them to Thee, and often drive Thee from them!" "It is true, My daughter, that My love has made Me sacrifice Myself for them, and that they make Me no return, but I wish thee to supply for their ingratitude by the merits of My Sacred Heart. I will give thee My Heart, but thou must first constitute thyself Its holocaust, so that through Its intervention thou mayest turn aside the chastisements which the divine justice of My Father is about to inflict upon a religious Community, which in His just wrath He wishes to correct and chastise." "Thereupon He showed it to me, together with the particular faults which had irritated His just anger, and all that I was to suffer in order to appease it. I shuddered from head to foot, and had not the courage to make the sacrifice." [3]

It is an historical fact that will tend later on to the

[1] Autobiography, p. 83.
[2] Tu es bien folle de faire cela!
[3] Autobiography, p. 84.

glory of the Sacred Heart, and which on that account ought not to be concealed nor palliated, that this Community for which God required Margaret Mary to offer herself as victim was none other than the Visitation of Holy Mary of Paray-le-Monial. Although it was regular and of strict observance, some more or less serious faults had nevertheless crept in. Amongst others the virtues of charity and humility were no longer practised in the degree of perfection which is expected of religious souls. This is the reason why the task of her, whom the Lord had chosen to appease His just anger, was exceptionally difficult. Hence an indescribable contest arose between this soul and her Divine Master. He wished her to sacrifice herself to His justice. "I replied that not being at my own disposal I could not do so without the consent of obedience. But the fear I had of being made to do it, led me to neglect speaking of it. He pursued me, however, unceasingly, and left me no peace. I shed abundant tears, and at length I found myself constrained to make all known to my Superioress, who, on seeing my distress, ordered me to sacrifice myself without reserve to all that He required of me. But, O my God, my anguish was now redoubled, for I had not the courage to say yes, and my resistance continued."[1]

The year 1677 was nearing its close. On November 21, Feast of the Presentation of our Lady, it is the custom for the Religious of the Visitation to make a solemn renovation of their vows, for which they prepare themselves by a three days' retreat. What took place during that time in the innermost heart of the Saint has remained her secret. She has, however, sufficiently raised the veil of suffering which then shrouded her, to allow us to assist at a scene which is all the more touching as it is mysterious. This humble Religious had been predestined to reproduce in herself the image of her suffering Saviour, and like unto Him she

[1] Autobiography, p. 85.

was to have her night of agony. . . Like to Him, she was, so to say, to be dragged from tribunal to tribunal. The Lord permitted all this because nothing is of more value in His divine eyes than the immolation of a soul in union with that of the adorable Victim of Gethsemane and Calvary. It was Saturday, November 20, Eve of the Presentation of our Lady. "This Divine Justice," she writes, "appeared to me armed in so terrible a manner, that I was quite beside myself, not being able to do anything in my own defence. It was said to me as to St. Paul: 'It is hard for thee to kick against the goad of My justice! But since thou hast made so much resistance in order to avoid the humiliations that thou wouldst have to suffer in this sacrifice, I will give them to thee twofold. I asked of thee merely a secret sacrifice, but now it shall be public, at a time and in a manner beyond all human calculation, and accompanied by such humiliating circumstances, that they will be a source of confusion to thee for the rest of thy life, as well in thine own sight as in that of others, that thus thou mayest understand what it is to resist God!' Alas, I understood it but too well, for never before had I been in such a state. Here are a few details, but not all." [1]

From this we see that, according to her own acknowledgment, Saint Margaret Mary does not relate all that occurred. In particular she does not mention what Our Lord said to her concerning the manner in which He wished her to make the sacrifice; but judging from certain expressions, and with a knowledge of the Rules and Customs of the Visitation, it is not difficult to conjecture it. Nevertheless it is necessary to note that the Saint does not explain herself very fully. Let us return to the *Autobiography*.

"After the evening meditation I was incapable of leaving with the rest, [2] but remained in the choir until the last bell for supper, [3] giving vent to my anguish in

[1] Autobiography, p. 85. [2] About 5.45 p.m. [3] About 6 p.m.

tears and groans. I then went to collation, for it was the Eve of the Presentation, and having dragged myself by main force to the community room,[1] I felt so strongly urged to make this sacrifice aloud, and in the manner which God gave me to understand He wished it to be, that I was constrained to go in search of my Superioress who was ill at the time. But I confess that I was in such a troubled state that I seemed like one bound hand and foot, and to whom no freedom was left, either interior or exterior, save tears which I shed in abundance, believing them to be the only outlet to my sufferings, for I felt like a guilty criminal who was being dragged by cords to the place of torture. I beheld the sanctity of God armed with the thunderbolts of His just anger, and ready to hurl them at me, and to plunge me into the gaping jaws of hell, which I saw open and ready to swallow me up. I felt consumed with a devouring fire, which penetrated even to the marrow of my bones, and my entire being was seized with a strange trembling, the only words I could utter being: 'My God, have pity on me according to the greatness of Thy mercies!' Overwhelmed with anguish I remained sighing and groaning, being utterly unable to go to my Superioress until about 8 o'clock, when a Sister having found me in this state, led me to her. She was extremely surprised at seeing me in a condition which, at the time, I was unable to explain to her; and to add to my sufferings, I believed that on seeing me every one would know the cause thereof. But such was not the case. My Superioress, knowing that obedience was all-powerful over the Spirit Which ruled me, ordered me to tell her my trouble. Thereupon I immediately told her of the sacrifice which God required me to make of my whole being, in presence of the Community, and the reason for which He demanded it. This latter I will not express more definitely, for

[1] During the short retreats which precede the great feasts, the evening recreation is replaced by a more serious assembly.

fear of wounding holy charity and at the same time the Heart of Jesus Christ, in Which this virtue takes its rise. For this reason He wills that under no pretext whatever it should be made known. Having at last done what my Sovereign Lord desired of me, they spoke and judged of it in various ways."[1]

This last sentence is, in its conciseness, the knotty point of the question. In all probability it means that Sister Margaret Mary returned to the community room where, at about seven minutes past eight, the Community assembled before returning to the choir, and in the absence of the sick Superioress, according to the established custom, the Sister Assistant having asked the usual question, "*Have Your Charities anything to say?*" something extraordinary must have taken place. Probably this young and timid Sister fell upon her knees and declared aloud that she was charged by the divine will to repair the faults of all her Sisters. . . Humanly speaking, such an act and its future consequences were beyond all comprehension, especially when one remembers that the Sister who spoke thus was the same of whom a few years previously they had asked themselves seriously, whether it were advisable to admit her to profession, and also when one considers that she addressed herself to a Community of which the greater number of the Sisters belonged to families of high distinction from a worldly point of view. The Community was seized with an indescribable emotion. But the Rule had to be obeyed, and the Sisters retired for Matins, which on the eve of great feasts commences at 8.30 p.m. Mgr. Languet says that Mother de Saumaise, having been informed of what had taken place, sent the Sister Assistant to say, in her name, that all the Sisters who were assembled for Matins were, that very night, to perform a penance according to her orders, for God was deeply offended with them.[2] He

[1] Autobiography, pp. 85-87.

[2] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary, Edition princeps, 1729 p. 137.

adds that whilst the more virtuous retired to their cells to carry out the order of the Superioress, and take the discipline, the others at the conclusion of Matins hastened to the infirmary where Sister Margaret Mary was still to be found completely overcome with grief: "They could, however, learn nothing more of what had taken place, except that the Sister had said that God was deeply offended with the Community. This served only to increase their indignation," remarks Mgr. Languet,[1] who depicts this indignation in the strongest terms. Those which the virtuous Sister employs are milder: "I must leave all these circumstances to the mercy of my God, but I can affirm that I have never suffered so intensely. If all the sufferings which I had endured up to that time, and all those which I have endured since, were united and, thus combined, were to continue until my death, they would not bear any comparison with those I endured during that night, by which Our Lord was pleased to gratify His miserable slave, in order to honour the night of His Passion, although it was but a small sample of it. I was dragged from place to place, and subjected to the most fearful humiliations."[2] And again, she continues: "They thought that I was possessed or obsessed by the devil; they threw a quantity of Holy Water over me, and with the Sign of the Cross and other prayers, strove to drive away the evil spirit. But He by Whom I was possessed, far from taking flight, drew me yet more powerfully to Himself, saying: 'I love Holy Water, and I have so great an affection for the Cross, that I cannot refrain from uniting Myself closely with those who bear it like Me, and for the love of Me.' These words enkindled in my heart so intense a desire of suffering, that everything I endured seemed to me but a

[1] *Ibid*, p. 188.
[2] Autobiography, p. 87.

drop of water, which rather increased than allayed my burning thirst. At the same time it seemed to me that I could say, that there was no part of my being which had not its own particular suffering, the soul as well as the body, and this without any pity or consolation; for the devil assailed me furiously, and I should have yielded a thousand times had I not felt an extraordinary power within me, sustaining and combating for me, amidst all that I have related."[1] The night passed thus in torments known only to God, and without any repose until the following morning about the time for Holy Mass, when Sister Margaret Mary heard the words: "At last peace is restored, and My sanctity of justice is satisfied by the sacrifice thou hast made."[2]

Again addressing His docile victim Our Saviour added: "In imitation of Me, thou must act and suffer in silence, without any other interest than the glory of God, and the establishment of the reign of My Sacred Heart in the hearts of men, to whom I wish to manifest It by thy means."

"My Sovereign Lord gave me these holy lessons after I had received Him, but He did not withdraw me from my state of suffering[3] . . . In fine, my Superioress, not knowing what to make of me, ordered me to offer Holy Communion, and in holy obedience to ask Our Lord to restore me to my former disposition. Having presented myself before Him as a holocaust, He said to me: 'Yes, My daughter, I come to thee as a Sovereign Sacrificer, to give thee renewed vigour, in order to immolate thee by fresh sufferings!' This He failed not to do, and I felt so great a change in me, that I

[1] Autobiography, pp. 89, 90.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 87. The tradition of the Monastery of Paray-le-Monial is, that on the morning of November 21, 1677, *there were not enough confessors* to satisfy the imperious necessity which the Religious felt of purifying themselves by absolution before renewing their holy vows.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 87.

seemed like a slave who had just been freed. It did not, however, last long, for they began to tell me that he devil was the author of all that passed within me, and that unless I were careful he would bring about my eternal ruin by his craft and cunning."[1]

But far from advancing towards perdition, she was treading the path of the most heroic sanctity, accepting without reserve, " to appear no longer but as an object of contradiction, a very sink of vileness, of contempt and humiliation, which," she continues, " I beheld with pleasure overwhelming me on all sides, and that without any consolation, human or divine. It seemed to me that everything conspired together to annihilate me. I was continually questioned and the few answers they forcibly drew from me served as instruments to increase my torment. I could neither eat, speak nor sleep. My only repose and occupation consisted in remaining prostrate before my God, Whose sovereign greatness kept me buried in the profound abyss of my own nothingness, continually weeping, sighing and entreating Him that in His mercy He would turn away the scourge of His just anger."[2] . . .

It is well known that Margaret Mary never indicates facts by dates, but the following account of a combat of love, in which the prize was awarded to her zeal, too evidently refers to this period and should, therefore, be inserted here : " Having once made known to me the chastisement He was going to inflict on certain souls," she writes, " I cast myself at His Sacred Feet, saying : ' O my Saviour, discharge on me all Thy wrath, and efface my name from the Book of Life, rather than let these souls be lost who have cost Thee so much ! ' To which He replied : ' But they love thee not, and cease not to afflict thee !' ' It matters not, my God, provided that they love Thee, I will not cease to implore Thee to pardon them !' ' Let Me do as I will, I can bear with them no longer.' Then, pleading still more

[1] Autobiography, p. 90. [2] *Ibid*, p. 88.

earnestly: 'No, my Lord, I will not leave Thee till Thou hast pardoned them!' To which He replied: 'I am willing to do so if thou wilt answer for them.' 'Yes, my God, but I will always pay Thee with Thine own goods, namely, the treasures of Thy Sacred Heart!' With this He was satisfied."[1]

It would seem as though Our Lord took upon Himself the care of vindicating the reputation of the Community of Paray, when He said to Margaret Mary: "I do thee a great honour, My dear daughter, in making use of such noble instruments to crucify thee. My Eternal Father delivered Me to be crucified into the hands of pitiless executioners, but in thy regard I make use of souls who are devoted and consecrated to Me, into whose power I have delivered thee, and for the salvation of whom I wish thee to endure all that they will cause thee to suffer."[2]

These Religious, therefore, who were the cause of so much suffering to their angelic companion, were agreeable to God, and it was only by a secret permission of His divine wisdom, which aimed at the sanctification of the humble favourite of His Heart, that they treated her thus; for according to St. Paul, "All things work together unto good to them that love God."[3] But to conclude the description of the interior dispositions of our Saint: "I was so absorbed," she writes, "and lost in my sufferings, that I felt neither spirit nor life either to behold or to feel anything but what was painful to me. But all this caused me not the slightest movement of uneasiness or of annoyance."[4]

Nevertheless, there was quite sufficient to injure her health. It has already been said that she was unable to partake of any food. This being perceived, she was called to account for it, and was ordered both by her Superioress and her Confessor to take everything that

[1] Autobiography, p. 108.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 98.
[3] Romans viii, 28.
[4] Autobiography, p. 88.

was served to her at table. Although this order seemed beyond her strength, she, nevertheless, obeyed. The result was frequent vomiting and a general breakdown, so much so that they were soon obliged to release her from the obedience, and she was told to take only that which she felt she could digest.

Her spirit of mortification, however, lost nothing thereby, as may be seen from the following: "I endeavoured to eat indifferently of all that was presented to me, but I could not prevent myself from taking what I thought to be the worst, and also the most in conformity with my poverty and nothingness, which continually represented to me that bread and water being sufficient for me, everything else was superfluous. In fine, I must own that the necessity to eat became a torment to me, and I went to the refectory as to a place of torture, to which sin had condemned me."[1]

When the above events took place, only a few months still remained for the Community of Paray to be under the government of Mother de Saumaise. At the Ascension of 1678, resigning her charge of Superioress, she returned to Dijon, the house of her profession, and in the following year she was elected Superioress at Moulins. On leaving Paray, Mother de Saumaise took with her the blessed germ of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which later on, when the hour destined by God had arrived, she was to spread far and wide. She was also convinced that the Sister who had been professed on November 6, 1672, was according to the words of Father de la Colombière, *a chosen soul* (une âme de grâce). Consequently, when in 1690 she was called upon to say what she knew concerning Margaret Mary, Mother de Saumaise gave the following unequivocal testimony, which is to be found in her *Mémoire*: "During the six years that I knew our Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, I am able to say that I never perceived her to relax for an instant in the resolution she took, at

[1] Autobiography, p. 89.

the time when she consecrated herself to God by her religious profession, to allow Him to reign in her, above, before, and in all things ; never permitting herself to indulge in any gratification, either of mind or body. This fidelity drew down upon her from the Divine Goodness most special graces and favours, which led her to a very great desire of crosses, humiliations and sufferings ; so that it might be said, without exaggeration, that no one was ever more ambitious of honour and pleasure than she was of crosses, although, whilst delighting in them, she felt them most keenly." [1]

Who was now to take the place of Mother de Saumaise, in regard to this humble soul, invested with so great a mission ?

In the admirable economy of Its designs, Providence had provided for this, in the person of Mother Péronne Rosalie Greyfié, professed of the first Monastery of Annecy, who may truly be styled a remarkable Superioress. Whilst but a mere child she received the blessing of St. Jane de Chantal. At the age of twelve, she entered the first Monastery of the Visitation at Annecy, as a Sister of the Little Habit, whence she passed to the novitiate and was professed, when only seventeen, on August 10, 1655. Thus it was that she imbibed the true spirit of the Institute at its very source, and was so penetrated with it, that in 1670, when scarcely thirty-two years of age, she was deemed capable of being elected Superioress at Thonon. Six years of superiority did but develop the great qualities of this fervent Religious, and God, Who had destined her to be an instrument in a work which was yet unknown to her, hastened to prepare her for His plans.

Thus, in 1678, if anyone were ready to undertake the direction of such a soul as that of Margaret Mary, to sound her supernatural states, and test them in the crucible, it was undoubtedly Mother Greyfié. Endowed with a superior mind and an exceptional power

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 95.

of judgment, she immediately understood the situation and made her plans accordingly. "When I entered on the service of your house," she writes to the Monastery of Paray, after the death of Sister Margaret Mary, "though your Community was very good, virtuous and pious, I found, nevertheless, very divided opinions respecting that true spouse of the crucified Saviour, and finding myself inexperienced and without help in the duty of guiding her along so extraordinary a way, I trusted, in great measure, to the repeated assurances made to me by herself, viz., that Our Lord would lead me to act according to His will in her regard. Thereupon I followed fearlessly my natural inclination, which prompted me to seek peace and tranquillity. Consequently, with a view to satisfying everyone, I seldom appeared to give heed to anything extraordinary which passed in this soul. I never brought her forward, either within or without the house. If it happened that she gave occasion of displeasure to anyone, even if it were the result of my own orders or with my permission, I allowed her to be censured, and I reproved her myself whenever it occurred in my presence."[1] This sufficed to prove to Margaret Mary that her new Superioress acted according to the Spirit of God and therefore she showed her an affection and a gratitude which daily increased, and which for that very reason will always remain free from the suspicion that they were the result of any human sentiment. Consumed by the desire of making the Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ known and loved, His beloved disciple was not long in speaking of It to her, who for the time being was to hold God's place in her regard. "I remember that the first time I had the happiness of conversing with this dear Sister," writes Mother Greyfié, "she appeared to me to have a strong and ardent desire to discover some means of making this Adorable Heart

[1] *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 350, 351.

known, loved and adored, if possible by the whole world. On the other hand she was held back by the low opinion she entertained of herself, and which increased every day. She sincerely believed, that for her to take part in the work, would suffice to spoil all and inspire a dislike for that devotion which she had so much at heart, and for the establishment of which she would willingly have given a thousand lives, were they hers to give."[1] In the meantime, she gave herself up to obedience, to be immolated without reserve. Mother Greyfié was a woman who struck without sparing; thus it was that shortly after her arrival at Paray, she forbade Margaret Mary to make the Holy Hour in the night between Thursday and Friday. The latter obeyed, but according to the testimony of Mother Greyfié herself, " during this time she often came to me full of apprehension, saying that she believed Our Lord was displeased with me on account of this prohibition, and that she feared He would exact satisfaction in a manner extremely painful to me; I nevertheless remained firm. However, the somewhat sudden death of our Sister Quarré, and other circumstances which attended the loss of so promising a subject, made me firmly believe that this was the punishment with which she had threatened me, on the part of Our Lord, and I hastened to give back the hour of prayer to your dear departed Sister."[2]

The retreat of the year 1678 left profound impressions of grace in the soul of Saint Margaret Mary. " This is what my Divine Master gave me to understand. As I was complaining that He gave me too great an abundance of consolations, for I felt incapable of bearing them, He told me that it was in order to give me strength because I had much to suffer. ' Par-

[1] *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Life and Writings I, p. 363, Cf. I, p. 213.

[2] *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. Life and Writings, p. 359. Cf. I, p. 166. Sister Marie Elisabeth Quarré, on whom Mother Greyfié had built great hopes, died on October 14, 1678.

take freely,' He said to me, ' at the table of My delights, to refresh thyself, that thou mayest advance courageously, strengthened by this food, for thou hast still a long, painful and rugged path to tread, and thou wilt often need to take breath and rest in My Heart, Which shall always be open to thee, as long as thou walkest in this way. I will that thy heart should be a refuge for Me, whither I can retire at My pleasure, when sinners persecute and drive Me from them. . . Never forget thy nothingness, and that, being the victim of My Heart, thou shouldst always be disposed to be immolated to My love. . . As I have already promised thee, thou shalt possess in exchange the treasures of My Heart, and I will permit thee to distribute them as thou wilt, in favour of souls that are well disposed. Be not sparing of them, for they are infinite. I have still a rough and heavy Cross to place upon thy weak shoulders, but I am powerful enough to support it ; fear nothing, and let Me do with thee and in thee whatsoever I will.' "[1]

About this time Saint Margaret Mary received a new pledge of her adorable Master's love. One day, when she was suffering intensely, He said to her: " 'My daughter, be not cast down, for I will give thee a faithful guardian who will accompany thee everywhere ; he will assist thee in all thy interior needs, and prevent thy enemy from availing himself of all the faults into which he thinks to make thee fall by his suggestions, which will be turned to his own confusion.' This grace strengthens me so powerfully that I seem to have nothing to fear, because this faithful guardian of my soul assists me with so much love that he delivers me from all my sufferings. But I behold him only when Our Lord hides His sensible presence from me, in order to plunge me into the rigorous agonies of the sanctity of His justice. Then it is that he consoles me with his familiar conversation. One day he said to me: ' I will tell thee who I am, my dear Sister, so that thou

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 192-194. Cf. I, pp. 276-278.

mayest know the love thy Spouse bears thee ; I am one of the seven Spirits who stand nearest to the throne of the Divine Majesty, and who participate most freely in the ardours of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.' Again he said to me : ' Take heed that no grace or familiar caress which thou receivest from our God, make thee forget what He is and what thou art, otherwise I myself will seek to annihilate thee.' " [1]

This heroic soul was to close the year 1678 by a solemn act. Our Saviour, as Sacrificer, commanded her to make in His favour and in writing, a will or total donation of all she would do and suffer, as well as of all the prayers and suffrages which would be offered for her during her life and after her death. The Divine Master willed that this should be done according to the usual custom, and ordered Sister Margaret Mary to ask Mother Greyfié to act as notary in this affair, promising to repay her well if she consented to do so. In the event of her Superioress refusing, Margaret Mary was to address herself to Father de la Colombière. After due consideration, however, Mother Greyfié willingly consented, and wrote with her own hand as follows : " May Jesus ever live in the heart of His spouse, Sister Margaret Mary, for whom, and in virtue of the power which God gives me over her, I offer, dedicate and consecrate, purely and inviolably to the Sacred and Adorable Heart of Jesus, all the good which she may do during her life, and whatever may be done for her after her death, in order that the will of this Divine Heart may dispose of it according to His good pleasure, and in favour of whomsoever He may please, whether living or dead ; Sister Margaret Mary protesting that she voluntarily strips herself in general of all, excepting the will to be for ever united to the Divine Heart of Jesus, and to love Him purely for the love of Himself. In testimony whereof she and I sign this deed, on the last day of December, 1678. Sister

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 159, 160. Cf. I, pp. 278, 279.

Péronne Rosalie Greyfié, at the present time Superioress, for whose conversion, together with the grace of final repentance, Sister Margaret Mary will pray daily to the Divine and Adorable Heart." [1]

When Sister Margaret Mary presented this document to Our Lord, He expressed His entire satisfaction, and said that since her love for Him had despoiled her of everything, He wished that she should have no other riches than those of His Sacred Heart, the donation of which He forthwith made to her, " making me write it in my own blood, as He dictated it, after which I signed it on my heart with a penknife, writing at the same time His Sacred Name of Jesus." [2] We read in the *Mémoire* of her Contemporaries: " After this donation," she says, " I signed it upon my heart according to the wish of my Divine Master, and I sign it again here: Sister Margaret Mary, disciple of the Divine Heart of the Adorable Jesus, Who, after He had given Himself to me in Holy Communion, made me read in His Adorable Heart what was written therein for me."—What follows is written in her blood.—" I constitute thee heiress of My Heart and of all Its treasures, for time and eternity, allowing thee to dispose of them according to thy desire; and I promise thee that thou wilt fail to receive assistance only when My Heart is wanting in power. Thou shalt be for ever Its beloved disciple, the sport of Its good pleasure and the victim of Its desires; in It alone wilt thou find the satisfaction of all thy desires; It will repair and supply for thy deficiencies and discharge all thy obligations." [3]

Let us try to explain this fact more clearly. It is necessary that it should be carefully studied, to be rightly understood. The following may therefore be regarded as the logical order of the transaction. Sister

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 408. Cf. I, pp. 172, 173.
[2] Autobiography, p. 96.
[3] Contemporaries give a slightly different version of this text. Cf. Life and Writings, I, p. 173.

Margaret Mary presents the will in question to Our Lord and in a transport of love she engraves on her heart the Holy Name of Jesus; she then signs in the following manner the document drawn up by Mother Greyfié: "*Sister Margaret Mary, disciple of the Divine Heart of the Adorable Jesus.*" Finally Our Lord permits her to read what is inscribed in His Sacred Heart concerning herself, and orders her to write in her own blood the above donation: *I constitute thee heiress* etc.

In her *Autobiography* she thus continues: "After which He told me that He would reward a hundredfold all the good that should be done to me, as though it were done to Himself, since I had no longer any claim thereto. And further that He would bestow on her who had drawn up the deed the same reward as He had bestowed upon St. Clare of Montefalco; and to that end He would add to her actions the infinite merits of His own, enabling her thus, through the love of His Sacred Heart, to merit the same crown. This caused me great consolation, for I loved her dearly, because she always nourished my soul abundantly with the delicious bread of mortification and humiliation, so agreeable to the taste of my Sovereign Master."[1]

This will was dated December 31, 1678. It was about this time that Father de la Colombière, who, though deprived of the glory of martyrdom, had, nevertheless, merited the palm of confessor of the faith, having been unjustly accused and banished from England, returned once more to France. This apparent disgrace entered into the designs of God, for it led the saintly Jesuit back for a time to the little village of Charolais, and that at a moment when his presence was the most needed. Being somewhat troubled with regard to Sister Alacoque, Mother Greyfié submitted her doubts to the Father, who enlightened and reassured her saying that he did not in the least hesitate to believe that what passed in this dear Sister were true

[1] Autobiography, p. 96.

graces from God. "But," he continued. "what does it matter, even though they be diabolical illusions, provided they produce in her the same effects as are produced by the grace of Our Lord? There is, however, no sign of the devil having any part in it, for were it so, in trying thus to deceive her, he would be deceiving himself; humility, simplicity, exact obedience and mortification are not the fruits of the spirit of darkness."[1]

If the brief stay of this eminent Religious at Paray was a consolation for the saintly Sister, it was also an occasion of manifesting once more her consummate virtue. The Father desiring to speak privately with Sister Margaret Mary in the confessional, Mother Greyfié willingly gave her consent. Complaints, however, soon reached her ears; and although they were utterly groundless, and unworthy of those who uttered them, this enlightened Superioress nevertheless did not fail to reproach and humble her daughter in full Chapter. "Any other," asserts Mother Greyfié, "would have reminded me that she had not sought this interview herself, but had gone only in obedience to my wishes. She might have said even more, and would not have thought she were doing wrong in complaining, at least to those in whom she placed most confidence, of my manner of acting towards her, which truly at times appeared unjust in her regard. But far from this, as a good and faithful steward, Sister Margaret Mary profited by every occasion to become more humble, sweet and patient, and never in any way made the least assertion of her innocence."[2] But what was the opinion of Father de la Colombière with regard to Sister Margaret Mary? On March 23, 1679, he wrote to Mother de Saumaise: "On my way through Paray, I was able to see Sister Alacoque only once, but I derived great consolation from that visit. I found her,

[1] *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Life and Writings I, p. 361.
[2] Life and Writings I, p. 351. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié.

as usual, extremely humble and submissive, with a great love of the Cross and of humiliation. These are signs of the good Spirit by Which she is led; they are such as have never deceived anyone." [1]

The angel of darkness had a marked hatred for the disciple of the Heart of Jesus. "Accursed that thou art," he said to her one day, "I will capture thee; and if once I have thee in my power, I will make thee feel what I can do. I will seize every opportunity of doing thee harm." Furious at not being able to obtain possession of this soul, nor to entangle her in the deceits of pride, he had for some time aimed his attacks at her person, making it his delight to lay snares for her in every direction. At first he made her so extremely clumsy, that she dropped and broke whatever she was carrying. Often indeed, he showed himself still more spiteful. One day as she was carrying an earthenware pan full of burning coals, he cast her from the top of a staircase. Her enemy, however, met with his own confusion, for not only was she unhurt, but the pan was unbroken and none of the coals upset. [2] Humanly speaking, the fall was sufficient to have broken her leg. But her holy Angel was watching over her, as she herself tells us in all simplicity: "I felt that my faithful guardian was helping me." [3]

But the devil left her no peace, pursuing her even during the recreation. Several times whilst warming herself, the stool on which she sat was seen by the Sisters present to be suddenly drawn from beneath her, but they were never able to see who did it. The humble Sister would rise calmly and resume her seat. On one occasion this happened three times consecutively, and in such a manner that it was impossible to mistake the author of the annoyance. Sister de Lyonne ventured to say: "The devil must assuredly have a

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 148.
[2] Deposition of Sister Claude Margaret Billet. Process of 1715.
[3] Autobiography, p. 81.

hand in this!" To which Sister Margaret Mary answered merely "by a smile."[1]

Our Lord had forewarned her that Satan had asked to try her as gold in the furnace, and that He had given him permission to do so with the exception of anything against holy purity. With regard to all other temptations, she was therefore to be on her guard, and in particular, she would be subjected to those by which Satan had dared to tempt Him. It was not long before she experienced this in a terrible manner; and a sublime lesson lies hidden beneath the avowals of this great soul. "During that time," she says, "I was subjected to cruel conflicts on the part of the devil, who tempted me particularly to despair, giving me to believe that so wicked a creature as myself could not have any claim to Paradise, since I had, even then, none whatever to the love of God, of which I would be deprived for all eternity. This made me shed an abundance of tears. At other times he would attack me with vain glory, or with that abominable temptation of gluttony, causing me to feel a ravenous hunger, and then presenting to my imagination whatever was most calculated to gratify the taste; and this during the time of my spiritual exercises, which was an untold torture to me. This hunger continued until I entered the refectory to take my usual meal, for which, however, I then felt so great an aversion, that I was obliged to do violence to myself in order to partake of a little food. But as soon as I rose from table my hunger returned with greater intensity than before." On perceiving this, Mother Greyfié ordered her to ask permission to eat something whenever she felt these violent attacks of hunger. "This I did," says this truly obedient soul, "with extreme repugnance, on account of the great confusion which I felt. Instead, however, of sending me to take something, she humbled and mortified me

[1] Deposition of Sister Marie Rosalie de Lyonne. Process of 1715. Life and Writings I, p. 532.

greatly, telling me to retain my hunger, in order to satisfy it when I went with the others to the refectory. Upon which I remained in peace in the midst of my sufferings."[1] It was not, however, God's will to diminish the natural sensibility and repugnances of Saint Margaret Mary;[2] on the contrary, He had taken divine measures to increase them. "He willed that I should be in a continual state of sacrifice, and on that account, He told me that He would increase my sensibility and repugnances to such a degree that I should be unable to do anything without trouble and violence, so as to provide me with matter for victory in things the most trivial and indifferent, which I can affirm to have been the case ever since. Further, I was not to enjoy any sweetness, save that which was mingled with the bitterness of Calvary; and He added that He would make me find a martyrdom of suffering in all that might be a cause of joy, pleasure or temporal happiness to others. This He made me experience in a very sensible manner, for everything which may be termed a pleasure, became a subject of torment to me."[3]

One day Our Saviour gave her to understand that He desired to withdraw her into solitude; not into the solitude of the desert, but into that of His Sacred Heart; and He asked her to fast for fifty days on bread and water, in honour of His fast in the desert. She could not, however, obtain permission for this singularity, which was so totally opposed to the usual customs. Her Divine Spouse then assured her that it would be equally agreeable to Him if she were to pass fifty days without drinking, in honour of the thirst which His Sacred Heart felt for the salvation of sinners. The courageous Sister, therefore, commenced this penitential act, but she was not allowed to accomplish it on that occasion. She subsequently obtained per-

[1] Autobiography, pp. 99, 100.
[2] Cf. *Ibid*, p. 83.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 101.

mission to recommence, and succeeded in carrying it out for fifty days. She was also wont to abstain from taking anything to drink on Fridays, and this was all the more remarkable, as during that time she was unusually tried by an unquenchable thirst, which she took no means to allay until Saturday morning. She continued this practice for some time, until at last Mother Greyfié judged it expedient to forbid it, and commanded her to drink three or four times a day, between the usual meals. But in order to obey and at the same time to have something to suffer, she drank of the water in which the dishes, nay, even the linen had been washed. A Sister, on perceiving this, mentioned it to her Superioress, who knew well how to gratify the *innocent culprit*, by means of a severe reprimand.

The perfect loyalty with which Mother Greyfié has depicted the severity of her own conduct towards the Servant of God gives to the recital a charm, mingled with masculine power. Let us take as an example the mysterious pain in her side, from which the Saint suffered incessantly, and which Our Lord Himself told her could be relieved only by bleeding. "I have seen her bear this pain," writes Mother Greyfié, "in silence, without asking to be bled, to which both I and our Sisters were averse, it being necessary to have recourse thereto so frequently. It was regarded as a remedy suggested by her imagination, and not in reality one good for her ailment. She had, in consequence, frequent opportunities of intense suffering, known only to God and to herself. I was fully resolved, on one occasion, not to allow her to be bled, and several remedies were applied, all of which served only to increase her pain. She was at last in such a condition, that she was unable to retain any food; she nevertheless refused nothing that was offered her for several days, and was never heard to utter a word of complaint over the sad state to which the prohibition to be bled had reduced

her. When I spoke to her on the matter, she replied: 'I know well, Mother, that this is the only thing that can afford me any relief, but I do not desire it unless Your Charity does, for my Jesus makes you desire all that He wills for me; I am content to suffer as long as He pleases.' The malady, which was accompanied by continual vomiting, having reduced her to a state of such excessive prostration that she was scarcely able to breathe or to speak, I had her taken to the infirmary. No sooner was a little blood drawn than she began to breathe more freely, and recovered her power of speech; in a word, she felt such renewed vigour, that as soon as her arm was bandaged, she begged to be allowed to resume the regular exercises of the Community.

"With a view to spare her the little ordinary mortifications which this remedy brought upon her, I occasionally sent Sister Catherine Augustine Marest to bleed her in her cell. But Our Lord, Who willed not that she should have this alleviation, permitted that one day, when I had made use of this precaution, she fainted during Mass, and everyone at once guessed the cause. I was not astonished, nor am I now, at so many little annoyances on her account; for although it is certain that her life was most virtuous and edifying, she had, by her prayers, obtained from Our Lord that He would not allow anything to appear in her, except what would tend to humble and annihilate her in the eyes of others. Hence it was, that everything became a source of humiliation and contradiction for her; and at such times, when she felt this most keenly, Our Lord would remind her of her request. She owned that the *child of Adam* in her suffered greatly, but the *child of God* rejoiced in everything that caused her pain, either of body or soul, whether from God or from creatures."[1]

It would be necessary to quote almost all the advice given by Mother Greyfié to her spiritual daughter, in

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 353-356. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 123-125.

order fully to appreciate the broad views, the sound common-sense, and the kindness of heart of this great Religious. With regard to her dealings with Sister Margaret Mary, however, the last named quality seldom became apparent. In all those little maternal notes, written in a quick and hurried style, we find words of supernatural strength, combined with decisions of unquestionable clearness. The following will serve as examples: "I pray Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to command the tempest within you to cease, and I say to you in His name: Remain in peace! Your soul is the portion of the Lord, and the Lord is the portion of your soul. You will eat whatever you like and desire during the ordinary repasts of the Community; out of those times you must put up with your hunger. Humble yourself before God in your temptations. . ."

"Place your trust in the goodness and charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. Be not troubled by anything that may happen to you. It is the glory of a faithful soldier, and a sign of his fidelity, to be an object of special hatred to the sworn enemy of his prince. Kings and princes cannot always guarantee their soldiers against the malice of their enemies. It is not so with our God, Who cannot be deceived nor taken by surprise, but Who overthrows our enemy when He pleases, thus securing the victory for us, in spite of his rage and our weakness, which is made strong by divine grace, in proportion to our confidence."

"I will humble and mortify you willingly on every occasion, because you need this help, and it is a charity to provide you with it; and also because I desire the good of your soul. But this must not prevent you from coming to me with all confidence, or writing to me whenever you feel the desire or the necessity for so doing; I shall always be willing to serve you. Your soul is very dear to me, in spite of all that makes you disagreeable, burdensome and importunate. We must

imitate our Heavenly Father, Who grants you His favours without any merit on your part . . . ."

Doubtless this humble Sister had once again confided to her Superioress the irresistible and supernatural attraction which urged her to desire correction, to which she received the following prudent and touching reply: "As regards mortifying you, I would willingly provide you amply with this food of religious souls, if God granted you better health; but your infirmities deprive me of all courage whenever I endeavour to raise it in favour of your spiritual hunger. Tell Our Lord to give me less tenderness for your sufferings, or else to give you better health, otherwise He must dispense me from treating you according to your merits, when you give occasion for correction and humiliation."

"When you are questioned, reply briefly and sincerely, exactly what you think, and do not afterwards reflect on what you may have said, in order to know whether it was well received or not, for such reflections may be styled the acorns on which self-love is nourished. Unfortunately, it does not meet with its death on St. Martin's Day, like the hogs, but will continue to exist as long as we ourselves live. There is no device which this accursed self-love does not put into play, in order to deprive of holy simplicity souls called to love God by constant self-renunciation. . ."

"Since you belong to God, what does it matter whether His will is to mould you as wax, or to play with you as with a ball (une paume). Abandon self for love, abandon it through love, abandon it in the love of Jesus Christ. This is, I believe, what God desires of you, for He takes pleasure in governing us, whereas we ourselves understand nothing of our own guidance. . ."

"I have lost the beginning of Matins," she writes again, "in order to read your note, and send you these few words in reply, to tell you, my dear child, to remain in peace in the midst of your interior conflict.

He, Who has given rise to it, wishes to save you, and it is for this reason that He pursues you; let yourself be taken captive by Him."

"No, my very dear child, I do not wish our union to cease; and were you a thousand times worse than you are, I would always wish it to continue."[1]

During the autumn of 1679, Sister Margaret Mary was more than ever inflamed with the love of God. Feeling that the wound she had inflicted on herself when cutting the Holy Name of Jesus on her heart was beginning to be effaced, she conceived the idea of renewing it by means of fire, in which the result surpassed her expectations, for open wounds were formed. On the eve of her retreat she felt it her duty to mention the fact to her Superioress, who replied that she would have a remedy applied to prevent any serious consequences. But this true lover of hidden suffering was wholly disconsolate at Mother Greyfié's proposal. "O my only Love," she exclaimed, "wilt Thou permit others to see the wound I have inflicted on myself for love of Thee? Art Thou not powerful enough to heal it? Thou Who art the sovereign remedy of all my miseries?"[2] This sufficed. Our Lord suffered Himself to be overcome by her confidence, and promised His servant that she should be cured by the morrow; and such was indeed the case. It so happened, however, that Margaret Mary was unable to inform the Mother Superior of what had occurred, before she received from the latter a note telling her to show the wound to the bearer thereof.[3] As, however, the wound was healed, Sister Margaret Mary believed herself dispensed from this obedience, at any rate, until she had told all to her Superioress. She went, therefore, and explained her reasons for not having done as she was ordered. If Mother Greyfié

[1] Advice of Mother Greyfié. I, pp. 395, 396, 400, 401, 390,412, 392, 413, 391. Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 177-179, 180-183.

[2] Autobiography, pp. 110, 111.

[3] This was Sister Marie Madeleine des Escures.

showed herself severe and without pity for this want of ready obedience, Our Lord did so still more. For three entire days He kept Margaret Mary annihilated, so to say, beneath His Sacred Feet, there to learn how to bemoan and expiate this act of disobedience; during which time His whole manner was that of an angry God. In punishment for her fault, He told her that this Sacred Name, the engraving of which had cost her so much, would no longer be visible. "I can truly say," she writes, "that my retreat was one of sorrow."[1] In fine, Mother Greyfié obliged her to show the wound to the Sister whom she had previously sent, although in reality no further remedy was needed, it being completely healed.[2]

Before experiencing afresh the vigour of Mother Greyfié's guidance, Sister Margaret Mary was sorely in need of her good Master's consolation; and of this, no one was so well aware as He Himself. Once on the Feast of the Ascension, whilst the Community was praying before the Blessed Sacrament honouring the moment when Our Saviour ascended into heaven, He appeared, surrounded with light, and drawing near to her, said: "My daughter, I have chosen thy soul to be My heaven of repose in this world, and thy heart shall

[1] Autobiography, p. 112.

[2] Mgr. Languet relates that Sister des Escures "found these wounds, which had been so deep and persistent, covered with thick dry scabs, which left no other appearance than the form of the Name of Jesus distinctly traced in capital letters similar to those printed in large books." *Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary*. Edition Princeps, 1729, p. 170. After the death of the Servant of God, Sister des Escures had the holy curiosity to examine whether there remained any trace of these wounds; and she assured Mother Greyfié that not the least sign of them was to be seen. To which the good Mother replied:—"What you tell me of this total disappearance is but a confirmation of the truth of the graces she received. . . I look upon it as a small miracle that she should have been so completely cured that no mark whatsoever remains." *Autograph Letter*. Archives of the Visitation of Paray. Life and Writings I, pp. 345-346.

be a throne of delights for My divine love."[1] These words alone would suffice to drown all the bitterness of the world in an ocean of divine sweetness.

However, fresh sufferings obliged the saintly Sister to be once more removed to the infirmary, and on June 19, 1680, the Eve of Corpus Christi, being unable to leave her bed, Mother Greyfié went to visit her, and Margaret Mary begged to be permitted to rise the next day for Mass. Perceiving that her Mother Superior hesitated to give the desired permission, Margaret Mary replied : "If you permit it, Mother, Our Lord will also consent, and will give me the necessary strength." Mother Greyfié then gave orders to the Sister Infirmarian to let her rise the next morning about the hour of Office, after having previously taken some breakfast. In the evening Sister Margaret Mary told the infirmarian that she would like to remain fasting so as to be able to receive Holy Communion, and hoped that Our Lord would give her enough strength to do so. The infirmarian, thinking that Mother Greyfié would have no objection, consented, and promised to obtain the necessary permission. Unfortunately, she forgot to do so until the following day, and only after having allowed her patient to rise at an earlier hour than had been arranged. It so happened that as she left the infirmary by one door, to tell Mother Greyfié what she had done, the latter entered by another, and finding that Sister Margaret Mary was not only up but was also fasting, with the intention of receiving Holy Communion, she administered a sharp reprimand. But let us listen to her own account : " Without waiting to hear any explanation, I gave her a severe rebuke, exaggerating her fault, which, I said, was the result of self-will, and want of obedience, submission and simplicity. In conclusion, I told her that she might go to Mass and Holy Communion, but that since her self-will had given her sufficient strength and courage for this, I would com-

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 266. Cf. II, p. 168.

mand in my turn. She was to take her bed back to her cell, take her meals in the refectory, go to the Office when the bell rang, and follow all the exercises of the Community for five consecutive months, without taking any remedies during that time, nor entering the infirmary, except for the purpose of visiting or tending the sick, when the Sister Infirmarian required her help. She received my correction on her knees, with joined hands, and a calm and peaceful countenance; then, having heard my orders, she humbly asked pardon and begged a penance for her faults; after which she began at once to carry out to the letter all that I had ordered. Our Lord willed that she should obey in everything, and promised her in return the restoration of her health, which continued good from that day until the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, when the five months were up. On that day, when receiving the renewal of her vows, Our Lord renewed in her, as a special grace, all her former sufferings."[1]

When we consider Mother Greyfié's manner of acting, we must remember that she herself said later on: "I never spared corrections, but availed myself of every occasion to humble her, *even for those things for which in my inmost heart I esteemed her most.*"[2] And again: "I saw that Our Lord willed that she should be constantly gathering in a harvest of myrrh, and therefore, in order either to gratify the desires of my holy daughter, who yearned for contempt and sufferings, or to put her virtue to the test, I frequently provided her with the means of satisfying her craving for mortifications, and that in such a manner, that my esteem and pity always took her part against my own conduct towards her."[3] In a word, the more the Mother appeared void

[1] *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Life and Writings I, pp. 354, 355.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 385. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. This passage is not quoted by the contemporaries.

[3] Autograph letter of Mother Greyfié to Sister des Escures, November 5, 1690. Life and Writings, I, p. 343.

of all pity, so much the more she loved and venerated her daughter.

The following fact is worthy of remark, for it proves clearly that in matters of greater importance this experienced Superioress allowed herself to be guided by the lights she received from Sister Margaret Mary. It refers to the vocation of Mademoiselle de Lyonne, a proud and vain beauty, who was under the impression that no one on earth was worthy of her. She was, however, conquered by Jesus Christ, Whose spouse she consented to be, but hesitated not to keep Him waiting, by putting off from week to week her final farewell to the world. One morning, Sister Margaret Mary went to Mother Greyfié, and said : " Mother, Our Lord absolutely wishes to possess this soul; He said to me : 'I will, yea, I will have her, cost what it may !' " On hearing this, Mother Greyfié sent at once for Mademoiselle de Lyonne, as though she had an important message for her. The latter hastened to the Convent and assisted at Mass, during which a strange conflict arose in her soul. After Mass she went to the parlour, where she found Mother Greyfié and Sister Margaret Mary, who told her that she must enter there and then, without even returning home to make known her decision, since such was the divine will. Mademoiselle de Lyonne made a generous sacrifice of all reflections, but she owned to one of her friends who was present, that, " if she had seen Purgatory open before her, she would willingly have cast herself into it, rather than enter the Convent, so great was the violence she had to do herself." But instead of *Purgatory* she found *Thabor* in the religious life. She lived to the age of eighty-one, and as a reward of her heroic fidelity, she experienced during all her life the ineffable delights of divine love. But she never forgot that she owed her happiness in a great measure to Sister Margaret Mary, with whom she was ever united by the bonds of holy friendship. On one occasion when Sister de Lyonne

had sacrificed being present at a sermon, in order to remain with Sister Margaret Mary, who was ill in the infirmary, the Servant of God "promised her that she should not be the loser thereby, but that Our Lord would reward her for it. This was verified on the spot, for the holy invalid related to her such marvels of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for His creatures, and of that which they ought to render to It in return, that the soul of Sister de Lyonne was filled with more unction than if she had assisted at ten sermons."[1]

Sister Margaret Mary was again to be the object of a sudden and miraculous cure. Towards the end of the year 1681, Mother Greyfié felt inwardly urged to order Sister Margaret Mary suddenly to quit the infirmary where she was laid up with a violent fever, in order that she might begin her annual retreat in the prescribed order. "Go, my daughter," she said, "I entrust you to the care of Our Lord Jesus Christ; may He direct, govern and cure you according to His will!" The humble Sister owned that she was surprised at receiving such an order, being ill with high fever at the time. Nevertheless, she joyfully set to work to carry out the obedience, severe though it appeared, saying to herself: "Everything is equally good to me, provided that He is satisfied, and I love Him; this suffices for me." No sooner was she in her little cell *alone with Him*, than He appeared to her as she lay prostrate on the ground, shivering with cold, and suffering intense pain. Raising her gently, He loaded her with caresses, and said: "Now thou art wholly Mine, and entirely under My care; I will, therefore, give thee back in perfect health to those who have thus placed thee in My Hands." "And He restored me so completely," she continues, "that it seemed as though I had never been ill. All were filled with astonishment, especially

[1] Life and Writings III. Life of Sister Rosalie de Lyonne, pp. 400, 404, 405. Mademoiselle de Lyonne entered the Monastery early in the year 1680.

my Superioress, who knew everything that had taken place."[1] She spent this retreat amidst such a profusion of interior joy and spiritual delights, that the happy retreatant believed herself in Paradise, being, as she was, the object of continual favours and familiar caresses on the part of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Virgin, as also of her good Angel, and her Holy Founder, St. Francis of Sales. Added to this, her Divine Master had reserved a special grace for her, "in order to console me for the grief He had caused me by effacing His Adorable Name from my heart, Which I had written thereon with so much suffering. He desired to imprint It Himself interiorly, and stamp It exteriorly with the heated style and fire of His pure love. This He did in a manner which filled me with more joy and consolation than the former had caused me pain and affliction."[2]

When Margaret Mary was in doubt about anything, she was wont, as she herself asserts, to go straight to Him, Who is the Truth and the Light, to be enlightened by Him. We will relate one instance out of many others of a similar kind: "Being tormented with the desire of receiving Our Lord," she writes, "I said to Him: 'Teach me what Thou wouldst have me say.' 'Nothing,' He replied, 'but these words: My God, my Sovereign, and my All, Thou art wholly mine, and I am wholly Thine. They will preserve thee from all kinds of temptation, will supply for all the acts thou wouldst make, and serve as preparation for thy actions.'"[3]

In the career of one who had been elected and set apart by God Himself for a life of suffering and expiation, a supernatural chain of maladies or of painful accidents was almost natural. In very truth Our Lord left no part of the body of His servant without the Cross. In addition to a violent pain in the side, from which she

[1] Autobiography, pp. 113, 114. [2] *Ibid*, p. 114.
[3] Life and Writings II, p. 167.

had long suffered in honour of the pierced Side of her Saviour, she was also to have the privilege of honouring His Crown of Thorns by extraordinary pains in the head. One day when about to communicate, the Sacred Host appeared to her resplendent as the sun, and in the centre she beheld Our Lord, holding a crown of thorns, which He placed on her head, saying : " Receive, My daughter, this crown, in token of that which will shortly be given thee, in order that thou mayest bear a closer resemblance to Me."[1]

It was not long before she learned the meaning of this heavenly gift. Being at the time Mistress of the Sisters of the Little Habit, she was one day drawing water from the well, when the bucket she had just filled, slipped from her hands and dropping back into the well, caused the windlass to strike her violently in the face. The force of the blow broke several teeth, and fractured a portion of the jaw about the size and thickness of half a finger. Yet all this pain merely drew from her the exclamation : " My God !" and without more ado, she calmly asked one of the children to cut off the piece of flesh for her ; being, however, terrified at the sight, they all refused to accede to the request of their Mistress ; upon which she took the scissors herself, and quietly severed it from the jaw. Besides the intense suffering which was caused by the wound in her mouth, the blow she had received gave rise to a pain in the temple, which, after she had partaken of food, became almost unbearable and could only be compared to a violent toothache. " The only relief she allowed herself at such times," writes Mother Greyfié, " was to leave, with permission, the recreation, and take a few turns in the garden, until the pain had somewhat subsided ; then she would return and rejoin the Community."[2] When it was a

[1] Autobiography, p. 115.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 352. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. I, p. 165.

question of obtaining any suffering, Margaret Mary knew well how to ask for it, but when it was a case of rest or alleviation, Mother Greyfié adds, " others were obliged to think of it for her." [1]

The above accident was not the only one by which the head of this holy Sister was sanctified by suffering. She met with three other blows equally severe ; the first was, when carrying two jugs of water up some stone steps, she tripped, and in falling, struck her head violently against the stone. The second was caused by the fall of an immense beam ; and the third was a serious blow from an iron rod. [2] But she could never have too many thorns in her crown: " I confess that I feel I owe more to my Saviour for this precious crown than if He had presented me with all the diadems of the greatest monarchs of the earth, the more so, as no one can deprive me of it, and it places me under the happy necessity of frequently remaining awake at night, thus enabling me to converse with the only object of my love, being unable to rest my head upon the pillow, even as my Divine Master could not lean His Adorable Head upon the bed of the Cross. This slight mark of conformity with Him is a cause of inconceivable joy and consolation for me." [3]

Our Lord taught her how to unite the pain she suffered in her head with that which He experienced when crowned with thorns, and through these infinite merits, to implore the Heavenly Father for the conversion of sinners, and obtain the virtue of humility for those who outrage His Sovereign Majesty by their pride and haughtiness.

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[1] Life and Writings I, p. 165.
[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 198.
[3] Autobiography, p. 115.

CHAPTER V

FATHER DE LA COLOMBIÈRE RETURNS TO PARAY. HIS DEATH. THE SOULS IN PURGATORY.

1681–1684

It had been decreed by God that the two apostles of His Sacred Heart should breathe their last at Paray-le-Monial. In August 1681, Father de la Colombière returned thither for his health, but the state of suffering and prostration to which he was reduced was such that he was scarcely able to speak, and it was evident that he had not long to live. A slight improvement, however, set in and he was able before the winter to visit his spiritual daughters of the Visitation, and converse once more with Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque. Little is known of these last interviews between the "brother and sister in the Sacred Heart of Jesus," but it is certain that they were replete with that indescribable *something*, which is a foretaste of the "consummatum est" of the Servants of God. It soon became evident that the climate of Paray, instead of being beneficial, was on the contrary prejudicial to the invalid, and the recovery of the venerated priest was regarded as hopeless. Consequently arrangements were made for his removal either to Lyons, or even to his native town of Vienne in Dauphiny. Every preparation for the journey was made, and on January 29, 1682, one of Father de la Colombière's brothers arrived to take him away on the following day. Although the utmost secrecy was observed, Mademoiselle Catherine Mayneaud de Bisefrand happened to hear the news, and obtained permission to tell it to Sister Margaret Mary. The latter, on hearing of his proposed departure, begged

Mademoiselle de Bisefrand to tell Father de la Colombière not to leave Paray, if it could possibly be done without disobeying the orders of his Superiors. The message was delivered without delay. But the good Father wished to know more precisely the motives which prompted the venerable Sister to speak thus, and wrote a few lines with his own hand, in which he desired her to explain herself in writing. She did as he requested and a change of plan was the result. The note in question bore the following words :—" *He has told me that He desires the sacrifice of your life here.*" Father de la Colombière remained therefore at Paray in obedience to the heavenly order, transmitted to him through the Saint, and he breathed his last there on Sunday, February 15, 1682, at 7 o'clock in the evening. At 5 a.m. the following morning Mademoiselle de Bisefrand called at the Monastery to announce to Margaret Mary the news of the death of the saintly Jesuit. She replied sadly :—" Pray, and get all the prayers you can for him." At about 10 a.m. she wrote to the same person : " Cease to grieve ; invoke him and fear nothing ; he has more power to help you than ever." [1]

In her humility, Margaret Mary could not reconcile herself to the thought of its being known that what she had written to Father de la Colombière had been accomplished ; she, therefore, begged Mademoiselle de Bisefrand to obtain for her the note she had sent him. But it was already in the possession of the Superior, Father Bourguinet, who asserted that he " would rather give up all the archives of the house than part with that note." [2] Another testimony of the consummate virtue of Father de la Colombière and of our Saint is contained in the "opinion of the English Sister." [3] It also refers to the supernatural intervention of Sister Margaret Mary to retain the saintly Jesuit at Paray, where God wished that he should die. This document

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 151. [2] *Ibid*, I, p. 151. [3] *Ibid* I, p. 619.

contains the following: "Thus it is owing to our dear Sister Alacoque that Paray possesses this treasure; his sanctity is proclaimed by all the people, although he cannot yet be canonized. We hope, nevertheless, that this will happen in due time."[1]

But let us now return to Margaret Mary, and see how she accepts the painful trial of the death of her holy director. Mother Greyfié tells us: "By the death of Father de la Colombière this dear Sister lost her best friend. She was, however, in no way troubled or disquieted, for she loved her friends for the glory of God and for their personal advancement in His love, and not through any feelings of self-interest. I remarked, however, that she did not ask to perform any extraordinary penances, nor offer prayers for him, as she was wont to do for others; on my asking her the reason of this, she replied with a calm and peaceful countenance: 'He stands in no need of such help, Mother; he is in a position to pray to God for us, since, through the mercy and goodness of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, he has already been admitted into heaven. But in order to expiate some slight negligence in the exercise of divine love, his soul was deprived of the Beatific Vision from the time it quitted the body until his mortal remains were laid in the tomb.'" "I never heard her express any regret for him," continues Mother Greyfié, "but she often testified her joy at the thought of his eternal happiness, and returned thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ for all the graces which He had conferred upon this worthy Religious during his life, as well as at the hour of his death."[2]

[1] This English Sister was a young widow, a penitent of Fr. de la Colombière; when she left England in order the better to ensure her salvation, he sent her to Paray. Later she was professed at the Visitation of Charolles, and received the name of Sister Claude-Marguerite Boucher or Baucher.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 378. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 152.

Sister Margaret Mary was in the habit of passing the night of Maundy Thursday before the Blessed Sacrament, where, kneeling in the attitude of a soul wholly absorbed in God, she was an object of admiration and amazement to the whole Community, although utterly unconscious herself of the fact. At such times obedience alone was able to exercise any power over her. Thus, if anyone approached and said to her: "Sister, our Mother wishes you to go and warm yourself," she would obey calmly, and after about a quarter of an hour would return whither she had left her heart, for there was its treasure. On being questioned by some, who were curious to know what her interior occupation was at such times, she replied: "I am so occupied with the Passion of Our Lord, that I know not whether I am in the body or not, for I am quite insensible to it."[1] To another, she said: "My dear Sister, I am generally occupied with the intense sufferings which our Divine Master endured for us. At other times, I would fain chastise myself and all sinners for our ingratitude towards Him."[2] Let us once more quote the words of Mother Greyfié: "I remember, one Maundy Thursday," writes the worthy Superioress, "she was just recovering from a long illness, and was still in an exceedingly weak state,[3] when she came to ask the favour of spending the night before the Blessed Sacrament. I saw no possibility of her being able to do so, but wishing to give her some consolation I allowed her to remain from eight o'clock until after the procession in the town had taken place.[4] She accepted this offer, but in her sweet and humble way she begged me to prolong the time, saying that she would offer part of

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 530. Deposition of Sister Marie Rosalie de Lyonne, in the Process of 1715.

[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 543. Deposition of Sister Anne Elizabeth de la Garde Marzac, in the Process of 1715.

[3] This was probably in the year 1682, and consequently the night between March 26-27.

[4] About 10 p.m.

the night for me, and a part for *our good friends*, as she was accustomed to call the Holy Souls in Purgatory. With a view, therefore, to their benefit as well as my own, I gave the night to our generous convalescent, who did not fail to take up her station in the choir at 8.30, immediately in front of the desk where she remained kneeling, without any support, her hands joined, and motionless as a statue until the hour of Prime on the following morning,[1] when she rose and took her place on the stalls with the rest. You will find more than one in your Community who can bear witness to this fact. When giving me an account of her dispositions during that night, she said, that Our Lord had granted her the grace to participate in His Agony in the Garden of Olives, and that her sufferings had been so intense that it seemed to her as though her soul were about to be separated from her body."[2]

The Holy Souls in Purgatory had too important a place in the life of our Saint, for us to pass over in silence a subject so full of instruction. As we have already seen, Our Lord had, so to say, given His virtuous servant to these suffering souls that she might be not only their consoler, but also their victim; and it may be said with truth that she was continually surrounded by these afflicted souls, who applied to her with all confidence for help.

In several of the visions with which she was favoured, ample matter for reflection may be found. Amongst others, she writes: "On one occasion when I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament on the Feast of Corpus Christi, a figure suddenly appeared before me all enveloped in flames, the heat of which penetrated me so powerfully that I believed myself to be burning as well. The pitiable condition in which I beheld him caused me to shed an abundance of tears. He told me

[1] 7 o'clock.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 358. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. I, pp. 194, 195.

that he was a Benedictine monk, to whom I once went to Confession and who had ordered me to receive Holy Communion, for which reason Our Lord allowed him to have recourse to me that he might obtain some alleviation in his sufferings. He asked me to apply to his soul all that I should do and suffer for three months ; which I promised, with the consent of my Superioress. He then went on to say that the cause of his sufferings was : that he had preferred his own interest to the glory of God, through too great attachment to his own reputation ; secondly, a want of charity towards his brethren ; and finally, too natural an affection for creatures, many proofs of which he had manifested in his spiritual dealings with them, and which were extremely displeasing to God."[1] The three months which followed this vision was a time of acute suffering for Saint Margaret Mary, and it seemed as though she were continually in the midst of flames. But this martyrdom of fire was to produce a harvest of graces. At the expiration of the stated time, the monk again appeared to her resplendent with joy, being about to be admitted to eternal bliss ; and thanking his deliverer he promised to be her protector before God.

Even the prison-houses of divine justice were not closed to the confidante of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Who frequently permitted her to witness what was passing there. After the death of Sister Jeanne Françoise Deltufort de Sirot, of the Community of Paray, Sister Margaret Mary was terrified by the apparition and confessions of the deceased Sister. Her last agony had been fearful in the extreme, and she would doubtless have been eternally lost, had it not been for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. In her avowal to Margaret Mary of what she endured in Purgatory, she said : " Although there are many things for which I have to atone, there are three things for which I suffer more than for all the rest. The first is for having

[1] Autobiography, p. 106.

observed my vow of obedience so badly, obeying only in such matters as were agreeable to me ; such acts of obedience are but for condemnation in the sight of God. The second concerns my vow of poverty ; I desired that nothing should be wanting to me and gave my body superfluous comforts. Ah ! how odious in the sight of God are religious souls who seek to have more than necessity demands, and who are not poor in the true sense of the word. The third is for my faults against charity, having caused disunion, and been myself disunited with others. For this reason, the prayers said for me here are not applied to me, and the Heart of Jesus is unmoved by my sufferings, because I had no pity for those whom I saw in distress."[1]

In all probability this poor Sister was one of those who had persecuted the Servant of God, and the unfortunate soul was now permitted to appeal to her for relief.

Margaret Mary's charity embraced all these afflicted souls, suffering under the Hand of Divine Justice. " I never speak of them otherwise than ' as my suffering friends,' " she writes to Mother de Saumaise.[2] She was praying once for two persons of consideration in the world, when one of them was shown to her, condemned for several years to the sufferings of Purgatory, notwithstanding the many prayers and suffrages which were offered for her ; these were applied by the Divine Justice to the souls belonging to certain families dependent upon her, who had been ruined by her want of charity and justice in their regard, and having no means left to obtain prayers for their deceased relatives, God willed to supply for them as above stated.

One New Year's Day, the saintly Sister was praying for three deceased friends, two of whom were Religious, the other a secular. " Which one wilt thou have as a New Year's gift ?" asked Our Saviour.[3] Humbling

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 287, 288. [2] *Ibid*, II, p. 269.
[3] Life and Writings I, p. 378.

herself profoundly, she begged Him to make the choice Himself; whereupon He delivered the soul of the secular, asserting that it grieved Him less to see religious souls suffer, because He had given them during life more means of purifying themselves by the observance of their Rules.

The supernatural knowledge which Margaret Mary possessed concerning the Souls in Purgatory became so manifest, that many persons from without came to enquire of her the state of their deceased relatives. The humble Sister used to reply: "Can I know what happens in Purgatory?" Nevertheless, she would shortly after say to one or other of such enquirers: "God has vouchsafed a signal grace to so-and-so by admitting him to the joys of Paradise, after having passed only such and such a length of time in Purgatory." Others, however, she would exhort to continue their prayers and supplications.[1]

The deceased wife of Dr. Billet appeared to the Servant of God, and imploring her prayers, charged her, at the same time, to make known to her husband two secrets, concerning justice and his own eternal salvation. Mother Greyfié being averse to such commissions would not have anything to do with the transmission of the message. Shortly after the deceased again appeared to Margaret Mary. But the Mother Superior continuing to resist, she was alarmed the ensuing night by a fearful noise in her cell, upon which she no longer hesitated to despatch the message to the doctor.

It would seem that Mother Greyfié could have had nothing more to desire, in order to be fully convinced of the truth of the graces bestowed on Sister Margaret Mary; such, however, was not the case. Having been appointed by God to make her pass, so to say, through the crucible, this worthy Superioress demanded

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 531. Deposition of Sister Marie Rosalie de Lyonne, Process of 1715.

proof upon proof. And since she was but the instrument employed by the Holy Ghost, to manifest to all the intrinsic merit of that soul in which He thus wrought His divine operations, Mother Greyfié obtained whatever she asked, in spite of the apparent boldness of her demands.

During the year 1682 Sister Margaret Mary was constantly ill, so much so that she scarcely passed four consecutive days without some kind of suffering. On December 21, the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, she was reduced to such a state of physical weakness, that her life was thought to be in danger. It was at this conjuncture, that, entering the infirmary, Mother Greyfié handed her a note, telling her, as she did so, to act according to what she would find written therein. Our Lord had already made known to Margaret Mary the contents thereof, but she opened the note, and read as follows: "I command you, in virtue of holy obedience, to ask of God to make known to me whether what passes, and has hitherto passed in you since I have been charged with your direction, proceeds from His Spirit and movement or from that of nature. As a sign that all is from God, ask Him to suspend your bodily ailments for the space of five months, without your having recourse, during that time, to any remedies, or being obliged to deviate from the ordinary course prescribed by the Rule. If, on the contrary, it is not the Spirit of God, but merely nature which operates in you, pray that you may continue in your ordinary variable state of health; we shall thus be assured of the truth."[1]

When alluding to this incident, Margaret Mary adds: "I was ordered to quit the infirmary in words which were inspired by Our Lord Himself, in order to render it more trying and mortifying to nature. I presented the note to my Sovereign Lord, to Whom the contents were already known, and He replied: 'I

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 394, 395. Cf. I, p. 187.

promise thee, My daughter, that in attestation of the good Spirit Which guides thee, I would willingly grant as many years of health as she has asked months; nay more, I would give any other proof she might have desired.'" This promise of the Eternal Truth was fulfilled during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "At the moment of the Elevation of the Sacred Host," writes Margaret Mary, "I distinctly felt all my infirmities removed, just as though a garment had been taken off me, and I felt as strong and as well as a person who had not been ill for a long time. I continued thus during the stated time, at the expiration of which I returned to my former condition."[1] The five months required by Mother Greyfié ended on May 21, 1683, and one would suppose that she had every reason to be satisfied, since all had been accomplished in accordance with the programme she had herself drawn up. But no! demanding her note from Margaret Mary, she added the following lines: "May 25, I hereby declare that I have beheld you in a state of health, such as I commanded you to ask of Our Lord, and consequently I am constrained to acknowledge, that what passes and has hitherto passed in your soul, proceeds from the incomprehensible goodness and mercy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This I believe, but, nevertheless, I once more command you to implore of God the Father, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, that, for His sake, and to remove from me any further doubt, He will preserve you in your present state of health for a full year from the date of the first command you received from me. At the expiration of that period I will abandon you to His good pleasure in all that concerns your bodily health; but I require this space of time that I may be thoroughly convinced."[2]

The year 1683 was, therefore, one of health for the Servant of God. But was it also void of the inestimable

[1] Autobiography, pp. 112, 113.
[2] Life and Writings I, p. 395. Cf. I, p. 128.

benefit of suffering? Far from it, for being given up in a more special manner to the Souls in Purgatory, sufferings similar to those produced by fire seemed to reduce the most sensitive part of her moral being to ashes. Such interior sufferings gave rise to unutterable anguish, but in the midst of all this, her soul was filled with heavenly consolation at the sight of the eternal bliss reserved for certain privileged souls on their release from Purgatory.

On February 5, 1683, the Superioress of the first Monastery of Annecy, Mother Marie Philiberte Emmanuel de Monthoux died a saintly death. Nevertheless, she had to be purified before being admitted into the presence of God; and Our Lord showed Margaret Mary that the prayers and suffrages which were offered by the whole Order of the Visitation for the soul of that venerated Mother brought her considerable relief. On Maundy Thursday, April 15, it seemed to her that she beheld that soul at the foot of the ciborium in which the Sacred Host reposed, participating in the merits of Our Saviour's Agony. On Easter Sunday, she again saw her, and this time approaching her final deliverance. At last, on May 2, Good Shepherd Sunday, she beheld her about to enter into the glory and happiness of heaven, accompanied by Sister Jeanne Catherine Gâcon of the Monastery of Paray, who had died on January 18, of the same year. As she was going up to heaven she uttered the words: "Love triumphs, Love enjoys, Love rejoices in God!"

On September 7, 1683, Mother Anne Seraphine Boulier of Dijon expired, but her death was no cause of sorrow to Sister Margaret Mary, who "believed her to be enjoying the possession of her Sovereign Good."[1] It is evident, from what she shortly after wrote that the eternal reward of this holy soul had been revealed to her: "I believe her to be very high in glory, even in

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 272.

the ranks of the Seraphim, and destined for all eternity to render continual homage to the Heart of Jesus." [1]

In April 1684, Antoinette Rosalie de Sennecé who was being educated in the Monastery of Paray was suddenly struck down by illness, and a lethargic sleep having ensued there appeared little or no hopes of her being able to receive the last Sacraments. The whole Community was seized with consternation, for the child had endeared herself to all. In order to obtain a return of consciousness for the little sufferer, Mother Greyfié ordered Sister Margaret Mary to promise Our Lord whatever He would give her to understand was His desire. She no sooner did so than the Sovereign of her soul said He would grant the desired grace, " provided that I promised Him three things which He absolutely demanded of me. The first was, never to refuse any charge in religion ; the second, not to refuse to go to the parlour ; nor to write, which was the third demand. I confess that my whole being shuddered at this request owing to the extreme repugnance and aversion which I felt, and I replied : ' O my Lord, Thou dost indeed attack my weak points ; nevertheless I will ask permission.' This was immediately granted by my Superioress, in spite of my distress, which I made no attempt to conceal from her. He then made me promise in the form of a vow, that I might not be able to revoke it. But alas ! how often have I been unfaithful to it, for He did not remove my aversion, which continued to the end of my life. But the sick child was able to receive the last Sacraments." [2]

There were, however, exceptions to this repugnance which Margaret Mary had for the parlour. Mother

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 288.

[2] Autobiography, p. 110. This " little sister " de Sennecé was a privileged child. At the age of seven, she made the vow of chastity, and was only thirteen when she died, April 26, 1684, having pronounced the religious vows conditionally on her death-bed.

Greyfié relates the following instance: "The Rev. Father de la Pérouse, being on a visit to Paray, expressed the desire to speak with Sister Margaret Mary owing to the great esteem which Father de la Colombière had manifested in her regard. After conversing with her, he thanked me for the consolation I had given him, adding that without his having said anything of his interior dispositions, this virtuous Sister had spoken as if she had read his inmost soul. Wishing to know whether she had felt her usual repugnance on being summoned to the parlour, she replied to my question in a bright and easy manner, that such had not been the case, for Our Lord had made known to her that the Reverend Father was beloved by His Sacred Heart. On another occasion she spoke to me in a similar manner of Father Rolin."[1]

On the Feast of the Ascension 1684, Mother Greyfié completed her six years of superiority at Paray, and was elected Superioress at Semur-en-Auxois. It may be said with truth that she had carried to the utmost limits the tests she had felt herself compelled to make regarding the exceptional way of Margaret Mary; nothing more remained to be done since every trial had been crowned with victory. Mother Greyfié now ceases to be Superior of this child of obedience, but she will never cease to love and esteem her; nor will she ever cease to believe in the truth of the mission which she had received from God. Thus another soul was gained for the cause of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and, what a soul!

This great Superioress had already a name in the Order, and was now called upon to spread her influence in a still wider circle. After governing the Monastery of Semur for six years, she was Superioress of the

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 374. *Mémoire* of Mother Greyfié. Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 301. The Rev. Father Rolin spent a year in residence at Paray for the first time during Mother Greyfié's superiority, 1683-1684.

second Monastery of Rouen, 1691-1697, and of the first Monastery of Annecy from 1700 to 1706, and again from 1712 until her death in 1717. Thus under the very shadow of the shrines of her Holy Founders she was able to relate all she knew of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, of which she was to become the first apologist and apostle.

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CHAPTER VI

THE LIGHT IS PLACED ON THE CANDLESTICK. THE SERVANT OF GOD AS ASSISTANT; AS MISTRESS OF NOVICES. TRIUMPH OF THE SACRED HEART IN THE COMMUNITY OF PARAY.

1684–1686

The departure of Mother Greyfié was for Sister Margaret Mary a severe trial, in the opposite sense to that which we usually attach to the word. Let us explain. Mother Péronne Rosalie was succeeded by Mother Marie-Christine Melin, a professed Sister of the Monastery of Paray. The distinguishing characteristic of this true daughter of St. Francis of Sales was her incomparable sweetness. Having long been an admirer of the virtues of the Servant of God, she was determined that such a light should no longer remain hidden, and therefore she proposed her to the Chapter as Assistant of the Community; the subsequent election of Margaret Mary ratified the choice of the new Superioress.

For the humility of the saintly Sister, however, it was a cause of no little suffering to find herself invested with a charge, which is necessarily accompanied by certain little marks of honour and respect. But what she felt most was being deprived of the costly bread of correction, of which Mother Greyfié had been so liberal in her regard. All this was so painful to her, that she could not refrain from pouring out her heart into that of her former Mother, to whom she wrote with the most filial confidence: "It seemed to me that I lived securely under your guidance, since you always made me act contrary to my natural inclinations, and it was this

that gave satisfaction to the Spirit by Which I believe myself to be led, and Which would fain see me continually plunged in all sorts of humiliations, sufferings and contradictions, without which there can be no rest for me. Nature finds no satisfaction in all this, but the Spirit Which governs mine cannot suffer me to have any pleasure save that of having none." [1]

In order to make up in some way for being in a position honourable in the eyes of creatures, Sister Margaret Mary delighted in taking part in the humblest occupations of the house, offering her services to the Sisters in the kitchen, helping them to carry wood, wash the dishes, and other similar work. One day when she was more than usually busy, these good Sisters begged her to come to their assistance. She happened to be sweeping the choir at the time, but she hastened to respond to the call of charity, without gathering up the dust. Unfortunately she was unable to return before the bell for Office summoned the Sisters to the choir, who on entering found it in the utmost disorder. This was no small mortification for the humble Assistant; but, according to her contemporaries: "such was her usual reward." [2] She acquitted herself, however, of the duties of her charge to the general satisfaction of the Community.

The annual retreat of 1684 marked an epoch in her life of union with God. Her Sovereign Master not only prepared her for it Himself, but also communicated Himself to her with divine liberality. A few words suffice to prove this. "On the first day," she writes, "He showed me His Sacred Heart as a glowing furnace into which I felt myself plunged, and I was at once penetrated and inflamed with so burning a fire that it seemed as though I were about to be reduced to ashes.

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 369. Letter to Mother Greyfié, quoted in her "*Mémoire*." Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 209. II, pp. 277, 278.

[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 193.

At the same time I heard these words: 'This is the divine purgatory of My Love, in which thou must be purified, after which I will make thee find in it an abode of light, and finally one of union and transformation.' "

Day after day during this retreat Our Saviour seemed to forget the distance which separated the creature from the Creator. Saint Margaret Mary thus expresses herself: "I was placed in an abode of light and glory, where I, a miserable nothing, was overwhelmed with so many favours that one hour of such delights would suffice to reward the united torments of all the martyrs." Then under the direction of the Holy Spirit she writes the following admirable passage: "In the excess of His charity He espoused my soul to Himself by an inexplicable kind of union, changing my heart into a flame of the burning fire of His pure love, that it might consume every earthly love which would approach it. He also gave me to understand that since He destined me to pay continual homage to His state of victim in the Blessed Sacrament, I was constantly to sacrifice to Him my whole being by love, adoration, annihilation and conformity to the life of death which He leads in the Blessed Eucharist."[1] It is her Jesus hidden in the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar Whom she takes as her model in all her actions, and especially in the practice of the three vows of religion. "Being about to communicate, He told me that He would come Himself to imprint on my heart the holy life which He leads in the Eucharist, a life wholly hidden and annihilated in the eyes of men, a life of sacrifice and death, adding that He would Himself give me the strength to do what He required of me."[2] It is evident that her soul was about to enter upon a new phase, namely *a life of intense immolation.* It was possibly during this retreat that the Blessed Virgin appeared to her with the Divine Infant Jesus, Whom she placed in her arms,

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 195, 196. Cf. I, pp. 280, 281.
[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 198. Cf. I, p. 288.

saying: "Behold Him, Who comes to teach thee what thou wilt have to do." Being filled with an ardent desire of caressing the Divine Child, "He let me do so as much as I pleased," she writes with all simplicity, "and when I was so tired that I could continue no longer, He said to me: 'Art thou now satisfied? This must suffice thee for ever, for I will that thou shouldst be abandoned to My power, even as I abandon Myself to thee. Whether I caress thee or cause thee pain thou must have no other movements than those which I shall give thee.'"[1]

Towards the end of the year 1684 the Mistress of Novices fell so dangerously ill, that it was thought necessary to have her replaced, and the choice fell upon the Servant of God. Sister Péronne Rosalie de Farges, in her deposition during the Process of 1715, affirms that she was charmed to hear Sister Margaret Mary speak of God and of the esteem one ought to have for obedience, and she adds: "It was this high esteem in which she and other Sisters held the venerable Sister, that prompted them to beg their Superioress to give her to them as Mistress, so that by following her example, they could learn how to advance in perfection in the state of life which they had embraced."[2] There was now in the Community a current of veneration for Sister Alacoque which was drawing souls irresistibly towards her, or rather through her to the Heart of Jesus. But all was not yet accomplished, time had been necessary and was still needed . . . But what is time to Him Who has Eternity at His disposal, and Who despite all contrary appearances knows how to lead all things to His own ends! Thus it was that on December 31, 1684,

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 166. Cf. I, p. 285.

[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 535. Deposition of Sister Claude Rosalie de Farges; Process of 1715. It must be noted that Sister de Farges is sometimes called Péronne Rosalie and sometimes Claude Rosalie. The former was her name in religion; the latter, her baptismal name.

Sister Margaret Mary was named Mistress of Novices in the Monastery of Paray-le-Monial.

The novitiate in a religious Community may be compared to a cœnaculum, or better still to a sacred laboratory where souls must allow themselves to be formed, and where after having put off the old man, they are clothed with the new. In a word, the law of transformation is the daily precept of novices. But those who have the direction of them must never lose from sight that it is a progressive work which, commencing during the time of the noviceship, goes on advancing in perfection until the day of the eternal profession. Experience, prudence, discretion, a practical knowledge of the Rule, combined with kindness and charity, are necessary in order to bring up souls to Christ. St. Francis of Sales says in his Constitutions that the Mistress of Novices must be "gentleness, discretion and devotion itself." Now Sister Margaret Mary possessed all these qualities, nay more, they were crowned in her person by an extraordinary sanctity. This humble Religious was therefore a perfect Mistress of Novices; nor could it be otherwise, for she had taken as principle of her action upon souls, to give them only what she herself received from the Heart of Jesus; and it may be said with truth that during the whole time that she held the office of Mistress of Novices, the Sacred Heart was Itself sole Novice-Master in Paray. When the novitiate was committed to the care of this privileged disciple of the Heart of Jesus, it was composed of several Sisters who had already been admitted to holy profession: Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère had pronounced her vows in December, 1683; Sister Péronne Margaret Verchêre in May, 1684; Sister Péronne Rosalie Marque de Farges in July, 1684; Sister Marie Françoise Bocaud was still a novice, and was to be professed on March 4, 1685; and a postulant, Mademoiselle Bouthier, who was to receive the religious habit on February 11, 1685, with the name of Sister Marie

Christine. Shortly after, an angelic soul, a true flower of innocence, came to bud forth under the tender care of Margaret Mary, in the person of Sister Marie Nicole de la Faige des Claines, who received the holy habit on May 12, 1686, and for whom Margaret Mary had a love of predilection, calling her her *little Aloysius Gonzaga* on account of her fervour and modesty.[1] It was to her only that Sister Margaret Mary foretold that she would be Superior in the Monastery of Paray; which prediction proved true, for she was the only one of her novices who in after years was called to that high office.

The happy faces of the novices, together with all they related of the virtue of their Mistress and her intuitive power over their souls, tended to add new fuel to the fire, and the admiration of the Sisters was such that Sister Claude Marguerite Billet (niece of Father Antony Billet, S.J., and of Dr. William Billet, medical attendant of the Community, the "most famous physician of the province,") earnestly requested to be readmitted to the novitiate that she might be under the direction of this saintly Mistress,[2] with whom she had contracted a holy friendship. This favour was willingly granted. Another Sister of the Community, Sister Anne Alexis Guinet de Mareschalle, a convert from Calvinism, took singular pleasure in joining all the exercises of the novitiate, even those prompted merely by the zeal and fervour of the worthy Mistress.[3] She owed much to Margaret Mary, under whose special care she had been placed, when, after her conversion, she had sought refuge and help in the Monastery.[4] In

[1] Life and Writings III, Life of Sister Marie Nicole de la Faige des Claines, p. 442.

[2] *Ibid*, III. Life of Sister Claude Marguerite Billet, pp. 372, 373.

[3] Circular of November 23, 1735. Life of Sister Anne Alexis Guinet de Mareschalle. Archives of the Visitation of Paray.

[4] Cf. Deposition of Sister Anne Alexis Guinet de Mareschalle. Process of 1715. Life and Writings I, p. 526.

order to understand the spirituality of our Saint, it is necessary to read the *advice* which she gave to these young souls. The *doctrine* she inculcated, which she first put in practice herself, was nothing more nor less than the religious life in all its purity—that life, so great and so real, which having its source in the love of God, finds its nourishment in sacrifice, abnegation and humility, to lose itself finally in this Sovereign love. She gave her disciples clearly to understand that cowardly souls are not fit for the religious life, which is a life of conflict, adding that great firmness is necessary to overcome the difficulties which are to be met with therein.[1]

Mgr. Languet writes: "No novitiate was ever more animated with the spirit of fervour and holiness, and never was there seen more of that simplicity, charity and obedience which constitute the special characteristic of the Order of the Visitation. It was through this saintly Mistress that the house was renewed in spirit, and became one of the most fervent of the whole Order."[2] That which she sought above all to establish in her novices was perfect conformity to the will of God. She desired that this divine will should be the rule and motive of all their actions, and consequently that their obedience should be blind, that they should live in a perfect detachment from all things, and go to God with an empty heart and disengaged from all trifles. One of her maxims was that self-renunciation is worth more than all the devotions of one's own choice. What she most ardently desired for them was, that they should be daughters of prayer, that is of recollection and silence. She was wont to say that a Religious of Holy Mary who does not love prayer is a soldier without arms, and that to attain to divine union one must resolutely undertake the destruction of

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 211, 212.

[2] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary, Edition Princeps 1729, p. 190.

self, by generous, constant and faithful mortification.[1] Writing to one of her novices, she says: "Suffering and joy should be equally acceptable to a soul who earnestly desires to belong wholly to God, to love only Him and His good pleasure. . . . Are you not attached to yourself, dear child?" she continues. "Our self-love is so cunning that it sometimes makes us think it is God Whom we are seeking, whilst in reality we are far too much attached, even to things which tend to His service. And the reason why we are troubled at having to leave them, is, because we are seeking our own satisfaction rather than God's. A heart which seeks and desires only Him, finds Him everywhere; and since your only object in becoming a Religious was to give yourself entirely to Jesus Christ, so He must be your All in all."[2] To another she writes: "See, my child, if you thus amuse yourself in arguing with grace, and not giving what it asks of you, it will become weary, and leave you to yourself. Can it be that your love for a creature is so intense, that you would rather sacrifice the favour of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord than give up this too natural affection?"[3]

The ascendancy which she gained over characters, differing considerably from one another, was so masterly and above all so saintly, that Sister Péronne Marguerite Verchère, "who, at that time, was not yet accustomed to the exercises of the cloister, remarked to her companions: 'She will make us devout in spite of ourselves.'"[4]

Her example gave to her teaching invincible force, and her unalterable sweetness in the midst of sufferings was a subject of the greatest edification to them. At the beginning of Lent, 1685, she was troubled with a painful gathering on her finger, and it became neces-

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 248.
[2] *Ibid*, II, pp. 684, 686.
[3] *Ibid*, II, p. 702.
[4] Deposition of Sister Péronne Marguerite Verchère. Process of 1715. Life and Writings I, p. 533.

sary " to lance it to the very bone," she writes to Mother de Saumaise, " but God be praised !" [1] Ere long she will have reason to repeat this exclamation, but it will be under circumstances infinitely more consoling.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Thus it was that Sister Margaret Mary frequently spoke with her novices about the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and she did so in accents so imbued with unction that their young hearts were quite carried away. The soil was prepared, and the holy seed of devotion to the Sacred Heart was now about to germinate. Ever since the First Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, for which they had prepared themselves by a *challenge* (défi), which may be entitled *a day spent in the Heart of Jesus dwelling in the Blessed Sacrament*, a " pen and ink sketch," representing this Adorable Heart, had been fastened by the saintly Mistress to the altar of the novitiate. As the Feast of St. Margaret, which happened that year to fall on a Friday, was approaching, Sister Margaret Mary invited her novices to offer to the Heart of Jesus all the little expressions of honour which they had destined for her on that day. The proposal was received with unanimous pleasure. A few fragments of a contemporary MS. give us an insight into this event, which could not have been more simple nor more touching. " Rising at midnight, we made an altar on which we placed this sketch, adorning it to the best of our ability, having previously prepared the refectory in order to be free after the morning Office of Prime. But not being as quiet as we should have been, we drew upon ourselves a reprimand from our Mother Melin, who had been advised to pay us an unexpected visit at the hour for rising. When, however, we told her what we were about, she was satisfied. After Prime our good Mistress came as usual to the novitiate, where she made with us an Act of Consecration which she had composed in honour of the Sacred

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 287.

Heart. She appeared to be very pleased with our altar, and suggested that each of us should write a consecration of her own, to which she would add a few words according to the interior disposition of each one. We did not fail to do as she proposed," adds the narrator, who was evidently one of the novices of that time. [1]

We have now arrived at the dawn of a new day, and must not be astonished if everything bears the seal of candour and simplicity. The whole of the Feast of St. Margaret was spent in praising and blessing the most humble and most amiable Heart of Jesus, and those who beheld Margaret Mary in the midst of her novices might well have taken her for a seraph. Nor were the Holy Souls forgotten; for, according to a custom which was very dear to the Saint, she went with her novices to the cemetery where they recited together numerous prayers for their dear departed Sisters. In the evening of that happy day, she thus addressed her little flock: "You could not have given me greater pleasure, my dear Sisters, than you have done by honouring the Divine Heart of Jesus, and by consecrating yourselves to It. How happy you are that Our Lord has made choice of you to commence this devotion! Let us continue to pray that He may reign in all our hearts. Oh! how glad I am that the Adorable Heart of my Divine Master will be known, loved and glorified! Yes, my dear Sisters, the greatest consolation that I could receive in this life is to see Him reign everywhere. Let us then love without reserve and without exception; let us give everything and sacrifice all things to obtain this happiness, for we shall have all in possessing the Divine Heart of Jesus. He desires to be all in all to the heart that loves Him; but this will only be by suffering for Him." [2]

[1] Archives of the Visitation of Paray. The writing of this MS. seems to be that of Sister Péronne Rosalie de Farges. Life and Writings I, pp. 316, 317.

[2] Life and Writings I, pp. 216, 217. The pen and ink sketch

July 20, 1685, had indeed been a heavenly day, but being spent upon earth, the inevitable drop of bitterness was not wanting. In her ardent desire to win all hearts for the Heart of Jesus, Sister Margaret Mary invited "several aged Sisters on whose virtue and piety she relied," to come to the novitiate, and render their homage to the Sacred Heart. But as these good Sisters were zealous for the exact observance, they rejected the proposal, saying to the young Sisters who brought them the message, that it was not for their Mistress, and still less for novices, to introduce novelties, and rules within rules, quoting at the same time the words of the 18th Constitution: "They shall not, under any pretext whatever, undertake other offices or ordinary prayers." Sister Marie Madeleine des Escures, who was the intimate friend of this holy Directress, even went so far as to add: "Go and tell your Mistress that the best devotion is the observance of our Rules and Constitutions; this is what she ought to teach you, and what you ought to practise."[1] Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère, the novice who had been sent with the invitation, had not the courage to repeat the exact words of the answer, but merely told her venerated Mistress that some of them could not come. Thereupon, with a firm voice, but with a calm and humble countenance, Sister Margaret Mary replied: "Say rather, they will not come; but the Heart of Jesus will know how to conquer them. He will have everything

honoured in the novitiate of Paray on the Feast of St. Margaret, 1685, is still extant. Since the year 1758, it has been in the possession of the Monastery of Turin, which was enriched with this treasure, thanks to the too generous liberality of Paray-le-Monial.

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 215. The MS. above quoted gives the answers of those Sisters who refused to go to the novitiate to honour the Sacred Heart thus: "saying that new devotions ought not to be introduced, and it sufficed for our Mistress to teach us how to observe the Rule without making us visionaries like herself."

done by love, and nothing by constraint. We must await His own appointed time."[1] When what had taken place in the novitiate became generally known in the Community, a new storm of indignation broke out, and this time it was raised in the name of the Rule itself. Could it be possible for such an innovation to be tolerated in a Monastery where, above all things, the strict observance was upheld! Innumerable must have been the times that this question was repeated in the hearing of Mother Melin during the octave of the Feast of St. Margaret in the year 1685. In order to maintain peace, Mother Marie Christine forbade the Mistress to do anything that could in any way attract the attention of the Community, permitting her to continue her little devotions in the novitiate only. . . . For Margaret Mary submission was not difficult; "but," she writes, "I feared nothing so much as that the Divine Heart would be thereby dishonoured, for all that I had overheard them say about It, was as so many swords that transpierced my heart."[2] To whom was she to have recourse in her sorrow, if not to Our Lord Himself! and He it was Who sustained her drooping heart by the repeated promise: "Fear not, I will reign, notwithstanding My enemies and all who oppose Me!" "This consoled me greatly, because I desired nought but to see His reign established; I therefore abandoned to Him the defence of His own cause, whilst I suffered in silence."[3]

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 216. In the Process of 1715, Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère deposed that the Servant of God replied: "To-day they are opposed to it, but the time will come when they will be the first and the most anxious to promote it, which indeed proved to be the case before the end of the year." Cf. I, p. 506. "On being told that such and such a one did not approve of the inauguration of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, because she had a horror of novelties, she replied: 'Let them be! the time will come when they will change their opinion.'" Deposition of Sister Anne Elizabeth de la Garde-Marzac. Process of 1715. Cf. I, p. 543.

[2] Autobiography, pp. 104, 105. [3] *Ibid*, p. 105.

In addition to the above prohibition, Mother Melin deemed it expedient to deprive the Servant of God of Communion on the First Friday of the month, which she was in the habit of making in accordance with the orders of her Divine Master. This displeased Him, and it was not long ere He manifested it in the person of Sister Françoise Rosalie Verchère, who was suddenly taken so seriously ill, that in a few days her life was despaired of. Sister Margaret Mary, who was praying for her recovery, was given to understand that the Sister would continue to suffer until the permission to communicate on the First Fridays was restored to her. The perplexity in which Margaret Mary now found herself can well be imagined. What was she to do? What was she to say? She could not act contrary to the will of her Superioress, nor could she withdraw herself from the solicitations of Our Lord, Who ordered her to make known to Mother Melin how much she had displeased Him. Feeling herself incapable of deciding how to act, Sister Margaret Mary sought the advice of Sister Marie Madeleine des Escures, on the rectitude of whose judgment and discretion she relied, although she well knew how much opposed she was to the new devotion. Accordingly she wrote a note to the said Sister, which commenced as follows: "It is in the Sacred Heart of Our Lord, my dear Sister, that I write this to you, since He wills it so." She then goes on to explain the situation to her, together with the message from Our Lord to Mother Melin: "Tell thy Superioress that she has displeased Me greatly, in so far that, in order to satisfy the creature, she has not feared to displease Me by depriving thee of the Communion which I ordered thee to make on the First Friday of every month. . . ." The saintly Mistress concluded by begging Sister Marie Madeleine to enlighten her in the matter: "Ask Him to make known to you the truth, and what He wills that you should reply to me; after which I will en-

deavour to think no more about it."[1] Sister des Escures' answer could not have been more concise: Sister Margaret Mary must inform her Superioress of everything, despite the very natural repugnance which she has in doing so. Mother Melin made no hesitation in restoring the Communion to the Mistress, on condition, however, that she obtained the recovery of the sick Sister. No sooner had she asked this of Our Lord than the invalid was declared to be out of danger. Nevertheless, owing to some misunderstanding, which would seem inexplicable, had it not been permitted in order the better to confirm the truth of the supernatural communications of Saint Margaret Mary, it so happened that either the Mother Superior forgot to give a precise and general permission, or the humble Sister thought that a further permission was necessary, which she did not venture to ask. Be that as it may, she did not consider herself authorized to apply the permission obtained to the ensuing First Fridays. In the meantime, Sister Verchère lingered on in a weak, languid condition, and Our Lord gave Margaret Mary to understand in a most decided manner, that she would not be completely restored to health until she had definitely resumed the Communions which He had prescribed. This state of affairs lasted five or six months. At last, regardless of the extreme confusion she felt, Sister Margaret Mary once more confided all to Mother Melin, who willingly granted her the permission to communicate every First Friday. Whereupon the sick Sister was restored to perfect health.

All these events could not long remain hidden, and the veneration of the novices for their Mistress increased daily, and this the more so, as an unforeseen circumstance had brought before the eyes of all the eminent sanctity of the Servant of God. It had now become necessary that Providence should interfere, but no one in the Monastery could have surmised for a moment

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 246, 247. Cf. II, p. 293.

how this unforeseen intervention was to come about. The "Spiritual Retreat" of Father de la Colombière had recently appeared in print,[1] and great must have been the joy of many in the Visitation of Paray, on hearing those touching pages read aloud in the refectory. It was impossible for the Sisters to doubt the truth of what they heard, and far from any feeling of mistrust they listened to the reading with riveted attention and edification; when lo! there could be no possibility of mistaking the author's account of a person to whom God "communicates Himself in the most intimate manner"; of the admirable vision with which she had been favoured when in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, "on a day of its octave"; of the special requests which the Heart of Jesus had made to this soul and which she had transmitted to the writer; of her predictions relating to himself and of the realisation of the same. . . All this was something divine and had taken place in the very church, nay, even within the Monastery itself. This person, this soul, could be no other than Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque. She was, therefore, neither weak-minded nor a visionary! That great director of souls, Father de la Colombière, had been entrusted with these secrets and had recognized their truth. And now he had risen again, so to speak, in order to reassure the Sisters in the most peremptory manner, by means of his book. What an unexpected revelation!

The Rule prescribes that the Sisters should keep their eyes cast down in the refectory, but, prompted by an interior movement which she could not resist, Sister de Farges ventured to glance at Sister Margaret Mary. Her look of profound annihilation not only struck her, but also confirmed what she had heard; and on arriving at the place of recreation, after leaving the refectory, she accosted her with the following words: "You have certainly had your share in the reading of to-day, my

[1] It was published at Lyons in 1684.

dear Sister, the Rev. Father de la Colombière could not have given a better description of you." To which she merely replied, that she had good reason to love her abjection.[1]

The devil, whose object it was to injure this great and privileged soul, left nothing undone to have her removed from the novitiate.[2] On Christmas Day, 1685, however, Our Lord made known to her His will that she should remain in her charge of Directress ; and showing her at the same time her novices under the figure of lambs, He said to her as He did to St. Peter : " Feed My lambs." She understood from this that He had destined her to guide them for yet another year, in order to strengthen them still more in the devotion to the Sacred Heart, and accordingly, she resigned herself to the divine will. The devotion of the novices towards the Adorable Heart increased daily, and certain members of the Community, being overcome by a holy envy, yielded occasionally to the temptation of joining them, thus to partake of their happiness. We find this in the writings of contemporaries, who assert that this saintly Sister could speak of nought else but of this devotion ; and that, not only with " her novices, but also with certain others who came, like the disciple of the Lord," to profit by the inspired instructions of Sister Alacoque. And, note well the following words : " They met together to ask of God the establishment of the devotion to His Sacred Heart."[3]

Thanks to the incentive given by Mother Greyfié in the first instance, and afterwards by the " Retreat " of Father de la Colombière, the Community of Semur was completely won for the Divine Heart, a picture of Which had been painted. In January 1686, Mother Péronne Rosalie, Superioress of that Monastery, sent a miniature copy of it to her former daughter, together

[1] Life and Writing I, 537. Disposition of Sister Claude-Rosalie de Farges. Process of 1715,

[2] Cf. I, p. 251.

[3] Life and Writing I, p. 252.

with a dozen little pictures " as New Year's gifts," to the novices and those who had joined them, each of whom was named by the sender, who writes: "There is also one for Sister de Champrond, your postulant." This young person was in the designs of God to be the cause of a formidable persecution which was ere long to assail the saintly Mistress. Mademoiselle de Champrond had joined the novitiate " in accordance with the wishes of her parents, who desired that she should enter here."[1] The vocation was, therefore, not from above, and the Directress very soon perceived that the postulant was not called to embrace the Rule of the Visitation. She, nevertheless, did all she could for the good of her soul, but her conscience would not allow her to consent to the admission of a subject who, it was evident, had not been destined by God for that Monastery. She did her utmost to incline the postulant to make known her real dispositions to her parents, but Mlle. de Champrond, being aware of their intentions, did not dare to open her heart to them. It was impossible for matters to continue thus, and Mother Melin, being obliged to bring the question before her council, soon found herself confronted with serious difficulties. All the members of the Community accused Margaret Mary of being the cause of the dismissal of this young lady, who was connected with all the principal families of the province ; and they failed to take into consideration the supernatural motives which actuated the humble Mistress. Thus it was that a new tempest arose against her, which, passing beyond the Convent walls, was increased not only by the blame of the great ones of the world, but God permitted that two Religious of high repute considered it their duty, so to say, to hold her up to public censure. One of them in particular, left nothing undone that could in any way contribute to bring her into discredit. She was spoken of in society as a hypocrite, an obstinate visionary, a person

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 224.

whose virtue was nothing but a farce and an illusion.[1] Matters went, indeed, so far that she was threatened with prison, and with being made to appear before "a powerful prince, as a person worthy of derision."[2] Some of these remarks were repeated within the hearing of Sister Margaret Mary during the Sisters' recreation. But it was somewhat of an alleviation for her, who in all sincerity of heart styled herself "a criminal nothing,"[3] to see herself thus defamed in the eyes of all. In the midst of this persecution she remained steadfast, nay, rather, she increased hourly in the love of the Cross, and her union with Jesus Christ was strengthened by ignominy.

Providence, however, arranged all things. The famous postulant without a vocation had two sisters who were being educated in the same Monastery. One of them, Anne, who afterwards entered and received the name of Sister Marie Joseph, realizing the extreme delicacy of the situation, undertook to speak with her parents, and obtained the removal of her sister, "exposing herself thereby to a thousand petty annoyances for the sake of the Community."[4] But this depar-

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 225.

[2] Autobiography p. 105. This powerful prince must have been Cardinal de Bouillon, Abbot of Cluny, Dean of Paray, and a great friend of the family of Vichy Champrond.

[3] From a Letter to Mother Greyfié, quoted in her *Mémoire*. Life and Writings I, p. 362, Cf. II, p. 308. The Deposition of Sister Claude Marguerite Billet during the Process of 1715 contains this curious detail, to wit, that Sister Margaret Mary "set to work to praise and thank God for having sent these two Religious to undeceive people, as she asserted, concerning herself, by portraying her in her true light. She asked to speak with one of them, whom she had never seen, in order that she might thank him for the true sentiments he had manifested towards her. The said Religious was so edified by this that he was forthwith filled with the utmost esteem for her, and always spoke of her as a Saint. After her death, he told the Community that he considered it a special grace to have been privileged to speak with so holy a soul." I, p. 522.

[4] Life and Writings III. Life of the Sisters de Vichy Champrond, p. 466.

ture was attended with so much noise outside, and caused such disturbance within the Monastery, that Mother Melin, finding herself in a most embarrassing position, finally decided to incline towards the side where she well knew she would meet with no resistance. She therefore imposed a penance on the Mistress, ordering her to apologize to Mlle. de Champrond, with a view thereby "to make satisfaction to her parents, thus pacifying them for the departure of the said young lady."[1] Humbly kneeling before the postulant, the Servant of God in all simplicity accomplished the order of her Superioress. The Lord doubtless cared little about satisfying the proud demands of the great ones of the world, who imagined themselves offended at what had taken place, but He regarded as something worthy of His divine attention, the adding of an exquisite jewel to the crown of this humble and saintly Sister.[2] But the persecution did not cease with the departure of the postulant, and the Directress continued to be the object of such cruel calumnies, that at last her novices could no longer refrain from openly giving vent to their indignation. In order to check this overwhelming torrent Margaret Mary at last broke the silence she had hitherto so heroically observed. The Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross, 1686, was approaching, and profiting by that occasion, she wrote them the following lines, which will remain as a lasting memorial of the virtue of this ardent lover of the Cross:

[1] Deposition of Sister M. Catherine Carme du Chailloux. Process of 1715. Life and Writings I, p. 519.

[2] Although not called by God to the Visitation, Mlle. de Champrond, nevertheless, entered the Abbey of Sainte Colombe where she became a holy Religious. Her three sisters, favoured with the vocation to that state of life which she had been obliged to renounce, entered the Monastery of Paray, where they made their religious profession: Sister Marie Joseph, and Sister Madeleine Victoire, on October 30, 1688, and Sister Françoise Eléonore on June 18, 1690. The Count de Vichy Champrond had, therefore, no cause of complaint against the Community.

"Live Jesus! My very dear and beloved Sisters in the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I cannot express to you the sorrow I feel at the bad use we are making of so precious an occasion of giving Him proofs of our love and fidelity. It is He Himself Who has permitted us to meet with this Cross, in order to prepare us for its feast; but instead of embracing it with love, we seek only to avoid and rid ourselves of it; and not being able to succeed in this, we commit a thousand faults, which fill this Divine Heart with sorrow and bitterness on our account. Whence comes this, if not from the too great love we bear to ourselves, which makes us fear to lose our reputation, and the good opinion we would wish others to have of us. . . But, believe me, my dear Sisters, humble souls are very far from such thoughts, believing themselves to be always more in fault than they are made to appear by the accusations brought against them." The holy Mistress insisted upon the necessity of profiting by humiliations and contradictions; then prescribing some acts of penance, she forbade her novices to speak any more of the matter amongst themselves. Should they prove unfaithful to the recommendations she had given them in the name of the Sacred Heart, "I will, myself," she continues, "ask Him to avenge Himself. . . If my love for you were not what it is, I should not grieve so much at your faults, which so deeply wound the Sacred Heart. This is what pains me, for I have your perfection so much at heart, that there is nothing I would not do or suffer, sin excepted, for your advancement in holy love. Belong to God, yes, wholly to God, my good children. Carry the Cross joyfully and courageously, otherwise you will have to render a most rigorous account."[1]

Nevertheless, in this hour of anguish and suffering Sister Margaret Mary had need of a word of authority to

[1] Autograph preserved in the Monastery of Paray. Cf. Life and Writings II, pp. 317, 319; I, pp. 226, 228.

reassure her, the more so as the enemy of souls sought to persuade her that not only had she deceived herself but that she was deceiving others as well. For some time past God had given her for director,a Religious to whom an eternal debt of gratitude is due, for having ordered this privileged soul to write a detailed account of the extraordinary graces she had received from Our Lord. Were it not for Father Ignatius Rolin, S.J., we should not possess the autobiography of the Virgin of Paray.[1]

If we are to believe her contemporaries, this good priest was at first considerably prejudiced against the Servant of God. His opinion soon changed, however, after his first interview with her, for he understood that he had to deal with a soul specially favoured by Our Lord, Who was making use of him to enable her to attain to the perfection of divine love. After hearing the general Confession of her whole life, which she made to him during one of her retreats, Father Rolin deliberated for some time as to whether he would not induce her to commit it to writing, and keep it, in order, as he said, that after her death all might know the extreme purity of this faithful spouse of Jesus Christ, and that the innocence, the delicacy of conscience and the sublime sanctity of a soul whom God had guided and had favoured with His choicest graces from her infancy, might be made manifest to all.[2]

On considering the advice given by Father Rolin to the Mistress of Novices, it is easy to see that he looked to God alone for the light he needed for her guidance.

[1] It has already been said that Father Rolin was in Paray in 1683-1684. From 1684-5 he was absent in order to make his third year. He was again sent to Paray (1685-1686), but was never Superior there. He died at Grenoble, August 23, 1720.

[2] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 285. It was probably during the retreat of 1685 that the Saint made this general Confession, because in his letter, dated Sept. 18, 1686, Father Rolin expressly writes : " I do not desire any more general Confessions ; do not even suggest making another, no matter to whom." The Autograph is preserved in the Monastery of Paray. I, p. 233.

What strength and wisdom are contained in the following lines! "My very dear Sister in Our Lord, it may be that I shall give you no reasons for the answers I shall give to your questions. I do not deem it advisable, and I think you will be sufficiently submissive to subject yourself to all that I believe God will inspire me to write. . . The Spirit by Which you are led is not a spirit of darkness; Its guidance is good, since It is always subject to obedience and leaves you in perfect peace when once your Superioress has spoken. I do not consider that in the persecution to which you are subjected, it is the devil who is giving vent to his rage against you; on the contrary, it is the work of divine love, and it is a consolation to me to think that He employs souls most dear to Him to make you suffer. The martyrs had not this happiness in their torments. Their tyrants were guilty of no small crime in thus afflicting them; but good souls who provide you with crosses are pleasing to God in the little martyrdom which they cause you to suffer. This thought ought to console you. I allow you to attribute all that happens to your own fault; although in reality it is an effect of the goodness of God, rather than of His justice. . . All these epithets which are applied to you, and are so humiliating, ought to draw from your lips nothing but acts of thanksgiving to Our Lord, together with prayers for those who give utterance to them. You have no reason to repent of anything you may have said. That which has given rise to such good crosses cannot be blameworthy. Let them complain as much as they will; have no fear on my account, the saintly Father de la Colombière is my guarantee. . . If all that is uttered against you were proclaimed aloud to the whole world, it would only be a further grace conferred upon you by Our Lord. Let them, then, accuse you before whomsoever they please, you have reason only to rejoice thereat. Dismissal, imprisonment, all is but a proof of the love of Jesus Christ

for you. All I ask of you is an entire surrender of yourself to Him, and a heart ready to do and to suffer anything He wills. I repeat what I have already said, you are not the sport of Satan, but rather of divine love, for we read in Holy Scripture that divine love is no less rigorous than profane love, whether it have its source on Calvary or be an effect of divine justice, which it would fain satisfy at our expense." [1]

The triumph of the Sacred Heart could not be purchased at too high a price. The sufferings of the Servant of God were excessive in the early part of the year 1686, because it was the eve of this triumph in the Community of Paray. On Thursday, June 20, the last day of the Octave of Corpus Christi, Sister Marie Madeleine des Escures requested the holy Directress to lend her the miniature of the Sacred Heart which she had received from Mother Greyfié, saying that she intended to erect a little altar in the choir, and thus invite the Sisters to this devotion. The proposal was received with joy by Sister Margaret Mary, who, however, carefully concealed her surprise, and contented herself with praying and obtaining prayers for the success of the enterprise. [2] She knew well that God has His appointed times and hours, so she waited patiently and in peace. On the following day which was Friday, and the very day destined by Our Lord to be set apart as a Feast in honour of His Sacred Heart, Sister des Escures, whom grace had completely transformed, prepared a little altar in front of the choir grating, and " covered it with a clean white linen cloth." She placed thereon the miniature in a gilt frame, and surrounded it with flowers. The first thing which met the eyes of the Sisters as they entered the choir was the picture of the Sacred Heart. They gathered round it, and their

[1] We give the text of an autograph which is preserved in the Monastery of Paray. Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 230-232.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 252.

astonishment soon gave way to admiration, as they read the notice written by Sister des Escures, inviting "all the spouses of the Lord to draw near and render homage to His Adorable Heart." It was thus that she signed with her own hand the retractation of her previous opposition, and made a noble act of reparation. She, who had been foremost in opposing, desired to be the first in adoring. An instantaneous change came over the whole Community, in which there was now but one heart and one soul, for the Heart of Jesus was acknowledged by all. The self-same day it was proposed that a representation of this Divine Heart should be made, and so great was the enthusiasm that "all those who thought it would be possible for them to obtain contributions from their relations," were requested to ask their help. "This is the work of the Lord," was the unanimous avowal of those noble souls, and wondering at the sudden change in their own opinion they added: "God is truly the Master of hearts, and is verifying what our venerable Sister has so often repeated: that the Heart of Jesus will reign in spite of Its enemies."[1] Mother Melin proposed that a chapel in honour of the Sacred Heart should first be erected, before painting the picture. Then it was that the Sisters of the Little Habit denied themselves some of their little pleasures, and offered their modest "contributions towards the building of the chapel."[2] If ever the poverty of the Monastery were a subject of regret, it was without doubt on that day. But labour is wealth, and the lay Sisters knew how to turn it to good account. Animated by the zeal of Sister Marie Lazare Dusson, who was devoted to Sister Margaret Mary, and had been overjoyed in assisting Sister des Escures in her secret preparations,[3] they showed such

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 253.

[2] Archives of the Visitation of Paray. MS. quoted above. Life and Writings I, p. 317.

[3] Life and Writings III, p. 377. Life of Sister M. Lazare Dusson.

persevering ardour in the cultivation of their garden, that a considerable sum towards the holy enterprise was soon raised. It is recorded in the annals of the Monastery that according to the testimony of these good Sisters, "the said garden produced that year double the usual amount."[1] In the evening of June 21, 1686, a *Te Deum* was not deemed too much to express the joy with which all hearts were overflowing. "I have nothing more to desire now," exclaimed Sister Margaret Mary, "since the Sacred Heart is known and begins to reign over the hearts of men. Do all you can, my dear Sisters, that It may reign for ever in yours, as your Sovereign Lord and Spouse."[2] The heart of the holy Sister was filled with many and divers feelings that necessarily sought various outlets. Her first impulse was to express her thanks to Sister des Escures, to whom she wrote the following touching words: "It seems to me that the ardent desire which Our Lord has, that His Sacred Heart should be honoured by a special worship, is thereby to renew in souls the effects of His redemption, by making His Divine Heart, *as it were, a second Mediator* between God and man."[3] Then alluding to the dangers to which the Visitation was exposed through the spirit of pride and ambition that was striving to take the place of that of humility and simplicity, which is the foundation of the whole edifice, she continues: "I acknowledge to you that it seems to me it is our Holy Founder who ardently desires the introduction of this devotion into his Institute, because he knows full well the effects it is capable of producing."[4] She then wrote at length to Mother Greyfié, giving vent to the supernatural joy with which her her heart was filled. "I shall die happy, now that the Sacred Heart of my Saviour begins to be known. . .

[1] MS. Annals of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray. Volume I, p. 100.
[2] Life and Writings I, pp. 254, 255.
[3] *Ibid*, II, p. 321. [4] *Ibid*, p. 321.

It seems to me that I am now, through His mercy, almost annihilated as regards esteem and reputation in the opinion of others. This is more consoling to me than I can express."[1]

At Semur this cherished devotion was ever on the increase; consequently, in her letters Sister Margaret Mary sought to congratulate rather than to stimulate. Such was the case also at Dijon, where, in addition to Mother de Saumaise, another apostle had been enrolled for the Sacred Heart, in the person of Sister Jeanne Madeleine Joly, who was the first to compose a booklet on devotion to the Sacred Heart.[2]

On July 4, 1686, in a letter to Mother Louise Henriette de Soudeilles at Moulins, the Servant of God speaks freely of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was bringing forth "abundant fruit, and effecting a change in those who consecrated and abandoned themselves to It with fervour." But full of ingenuity to remain in the background, she added the following lines, which, coming from her pen, can hardly be read without a smile: "We have found this devotion in the book of the *Retreat* of the Rev. Father de la Colombière, who is venerated as a Saint."[3] On September 15, she again wrote to Mother de Soudeilles sending her a copy of the *Retreat* of Father de la Colombière, and two pictures of the Sacred Heart as well, the larger of which she was to hang at the foot of her Crucifix, or in some other place where it would be honoured; while the

[1] Letter to Mother Greyfié, quoted in her *Mémoire*. Cf. Life and Writings II, p. 322.

[2] The first book of Sister Joly was printed privately in 1686, with a view of obtaining from Rome the approval of the Mass of the Sacred Heart. M. Charolais, Confessor of the Community of Dijon, revised and corrected the work before it was translated into Latin. It was not until the year 1689 that an enlarged edition was offered to the public. (Documents taken from a MS. preserved in the Monastery of the Visitation of Nevers, exiled to Mons in Hainault).

[3] Life and Writings II, pp. 324, 325.

smaller one she was to carry about her person, together with a little consecration to the Sacred Heart. Her soul overflowed with joy when speaking of this Adorable Heart. " It is the inexhaustible source of all good," she writes, " which seeks only to diffuse and communicate itself." [1] All the letters of Sister Margaret Mary, written at this time, bear witness to the difficulties which she encountered in her efforts to obtain a plate of the picture of the Sacred Heart. She is continually pained by the delays, misunderstandings and disappointments which oppose this enterprise, but she accepts and offers up all these trials in order thereby to hasten the reign of this Heart of Love.

If the soul of this saintly Sister shed abroad such ardent flames, it was because she was herself interiorly consumed by the fire of divine love. Nothing, however, could induce her to give up her humble life, hidden with Christ in God. The more she became an apostle, so much the more did she withdraw into the unfathomable depths of self-annihilation and detachment from all created things. We have a proof of this in the vow of perfection which she made October 31, 1686. Before doing so, however, she submitted it to her director, Father Rolin, for his approval. He replied in an admirable letter, dated September 18, 1686, containing seventeen points, of which we shall quote only a few of the most strikingly supernatural. " You will find here, my very dear Sister, an answer to the principal questions you have asked me . . . I tell you this with all the more assurance, as I am fully persuaded that God is about to make His will known to you through the medium of the most miserable of beings. Water which passes through a channel of clay is as pure as

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 328. Only one of the pictures mentioned in the letter is preserved at Nevers-Mons. It is the larger of the two which has been produced with a facsimile of the little consecration : I.N.N. give and consecrate to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, etc. Paris, Bouasse Lebel.

that which flows through one of gold. . . I perceived and understood enough of your misery whilst you were relating to me the mercies of God in your regard; your dispositions are well known to me, abide in peace. Do not torture yourself with the thought that you are a hypocrite; one cannot be such if one does not wish it, and as I do not think you desire to be one, be at peace on this score. Put your own words into practice: that it suffices for you to act and to suffer in silence. Be amorous of the Spirit Which guides you . . It is no sign of reprobation, that you experience no movements of joy or sorrow but those which the Holy Spirit impresses upon you. . . You must not think that you are hardened because you feel that peace which Our Lord permits you to enjoy under your crosses. . . I do not disapprove of the hatred you have for your body; for the satisfaction you feel on beholding its gradual decay is in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel . . . Nevertheless, do not treat it roughly unless you are authorized to do so by obedience. . . It seems to me that you are afraid of treating familiarly with Our Lord; but remember, that it is this manner of conversing with Him that pleases Him the most. . . I approve of your making at the close of your retreat the vow of which you speak; should you afterwards find that it is a cause of trouble to you, it will no longer be binding upon you, but you will be entirely released from it. Either I, or whoever else may take my place in your regard, will have full power to explain the vow, whenever any difficulties arise concerning it, or even to dispense you from it, if such be considered advisable and for the greater glory of God."[1] Being sure of accomplishing the will of Our Lord in making this vow, which had the approval of her director as well as of her Mother Superior, Sister Margaret Mary

[1] Autograph Letter. Archives of the Visitation of Paray. Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 232-234.

noted down in seventeen points all that God demanded of her. The opening formula may be regarded as a summary of the whole. "Vow, made on the Eve of the Feast of All Saints, 1686, to bind, consecrate and immolate myself more strictly, absolutely and entirely to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ." It would take too long to quote the full text, we will merely give the following two points :

1. "I abandon myself wholly to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord, to be consoled or afflicted, according to His good pleasure, attaching myself to nothing but to love and to please Him by suffering in silence."

2. "I will look upon all those who afflict me or speak ill of me as my best friends, rendering them all the good services I possibly can." [1]

After having noted down all that she believed God asked of her, this holy soul owns that she would not have had the courage to engage herself to it by vow, if she had not been reassured and strengthened by the following words which she heard in the depths of her heart : "What dost thou fear, since I have given Myself as security for thee ? The unity of My pure love will serve to keep thee attentive in the midst of the multiplicity of all these things. I promise thee that it shall repair the faults thou mayest commit, and will itself punish thee." [2]

The year 1686 was nearing its close, and the Servant of God was about to lay down her charge of Directress. [3] Several Sisters were also leaving the novitiate at the same time as their beloved Mistress, and they were resolved to take with them the little picture of the Sacred Heart, which was their greatest treasure, and which each one honoured day by day in turn, placing it as a fragrant bouquet near her heart, and being

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 235-237. Cf. II, p. 201.
[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 238. Cf. II, p. 203.
[3] MS. Annals of the Monastery of the Visitation of Paray. Volume I, p. 102.

attentive to testify her love to the Sacred Heart by making manifold acts of virtue in Its honour, according as her fervour prompted her thereto.[1] Finding a small niche in a secluded part of the Convent, near the staircase leading to the novitiate, they transformed it into a little oratory, in which they placed their picture in order the more easily to perform their devotions. These first disciples of the Sacred Heart of Jesus made this little oratory their favourite resort, and adorned it to the best of their ability. Later on they painted it with hearts and stars, intermingled with fruit and flowers, as though they would fain unite heaven and earth around the King of all hearts. It is generally believed and handed down by tradition that these simple paintings were the work of Sister M. Nicole de la Faige des Claines.[2] Sister de Farges had a picture of the Sacred Heart painted, which Sister Margaret Mary in a letter to Mother de Saumaise says was just what she had desired for the little chapel.[3] Sister des Escures considered it an honour to be the sacristan of this oratory. "It is a little gem," wrote Saint Margaret Mary, "she arranges it with so much care and taste."[4] How many fervent prayers rose towards the Heart of Jesus from this modest cenacle of love! In order to stimulate the devotion of the Sisters, pamphlets either in print or MS. were provided for the special use of those who frequented "*the oratory of the Divine Heart of Jesus of Nazareth.*"—"*You are requested not to take them away.*" Such is the recommendation which may still be read on these books, together with the date "*Dec.* 25, 1688." The dedication of another little MS. is still more touching: "*Begun on Thursday,*

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 255. This was not the same picture that was honoured in the novitiate on July 20, 1685.

[2] They are still to be seen on the ceiling of this modest little oratory.

[3] This picture is still venerated as a relic in the Monastery of Paray.

[4] Life and Writings II, p. 398.

October 16, 1687. *Live Jesus! My most amiable Saviour Jesus Christ, receive and accept these feeble pages which are dedicated to the honour and glory of Thy Divine Heart.*"

A new spirit animated the Community from the time when the Heart of Jesus first began to be loved, honoured, served and invoked by its members. Mgr. Languet, whom we can by no means accuse of partiality, describes in eloquent terms this transformation of the Monastery of Paray, through the devotion to the Sacred Heart. " It was thus that the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord wrought in this Community that marvellous change which the tears and sufferings of Sister Margaret Mary had sought to obtain. Her patience and humility had overcome all, and the Son of God now changed the hearts which had commenced to honour His own, shedding over them a love of religious perfection and zeal to attain it. But in proportion as the eyes of the Sisters were opened to behold the holiness of their duties, they were at the same time opened to the merits of her who was drawing down upon them so many blessings from God. Veneration now took the place of scorn and contradiction. She went by the name of ' the Saint,' and her words were received as so many oracles." [1]

[1] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary. Edition Princeps, 1729, p. 294.

CHAPTER VII

LAST YEARS OF THE SERVANT OF GOD. HER HAPPY DEATH. "HUMILITY GOETH BEFORE GLORY."

1687-1690

On laying down the charge of Novice Mistress, Sister Margaret Mary was again named assistant to the Sister Infirmarian. Here again she found wherewith to satisfy her thirst for abnegation and humility. Sister Catherine Antoinette de Lévy Châteaumorand was appointed to succeed her as Mistress of Novices; it appears, nevertheless, that "our venerable Sister Alacoque occasionally replaced this enlightened Directress."[1] This fact suffices to show the high esteem in which the direction of our Saint was held in the novitiate. As for herself, the more God manifested the extraordinary gifts with which He had gratified her, so much the greater was her desire to remain hidden.

Towards the end of the year 1686, one of her brothers, James Alacoque, curé of Bois-Ste-Marie, was seized with "so serious an illness,"[2] that his life was despaired of by three doctors. In his "Memoirs," Chrysostom gives the following details: "His teeth," he says, "were so tightly closed, that in trying to get him to take a spoonful of syrup, they broke not only one of his teeth, but the spoon also."[3] The said Chry-

[1] Circular of July 1729. Life of Sister Françoise Eléonore de Vichy Champrond. Archives of the Visitation of Paray.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 495. Deposition of Chrysostom Alacoque; Process, 1715.

[3] *Ibid*, I, p. 598. *Mémoire* of Chrysostom Alacoque.

sostom Alacoque, Mayor of Bois-Ste-Marie, and brother of the curé, despatched a messenger by night to recommend the poor priest to the prayers of their beloved sister. On being told that he was dying, Margaret Mary replied that she did not believe such to be the case. On leaving the messenger, " she went before the Blessed Sacrament, where she remained for some time ; then returning with a calm and tranquil countenance, she asserted both in word and writing that he would not die. Events verified these words, for contrary to the expectation of all, he recovered in less than a week."[1] What had this angelic soul done during those few brief minutes spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament ? She had " promised many things to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord " in order to obtain health for the dear sufferer, and Our Lord had inclined His ear to her request. " Yes," He said, " I will grant it on the condition thou dost propose to Me ; I would make a saint of him if he would but correspond to My designs, and to the graces that I will bestow upon him to that end."[2] At the beginning of the year 1687, she made known to her brother all the promises she had made for him. Then with the authority of a Saint, combined with the tenderness of a sister and the humility of a Religious, she gave him the following admirable advice : " God is not to be trifled with," she writes, and entering into details, she tells him all that must be corrected in his former habits, such as : attachment to the goods of this world, the love of gambling, hastiness of temper . . . after which she continues : " I hope all from the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is so filled with love for you, that He wills you should become a saint, cost what it may. It is for this reason that He still leaves you in this world and that He has sent you this illness, in order thereby to

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 496. Deposition of Chrysostom Alacoque. Process, 1715.
[2] *Ibid*, II, pp. 342, 343.

rouse you, and cause you to redouble your pace. Ah! what bitter sorrow for me, if you frustrate the designs of the Sacred Heart over you, by not doing that which He makes known to be His will . . . To tell you the truth, you will never find either peace or rest until you have sacrificed everything to God. . . You will have much to suffer before arriving at that point; but grace will not be wanting to you, nor the strength and help of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ."[1]

The way was now open, and with the help of her two brothers, the fervent Sister had the happiness of propagating the devotion to the Sacred Heart in Bois-Ste-Marie, where her brother Chrysostom erected a chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart in the parish church, and embellished it at his own expense. James, who had been miraculously cured, founded a Mass to be said on every Friday of the year, and which, on the First Friday of each month, was to be a solemn High Mass. On hearing all this, Margaret Mary was so filled with joy, that she wrote to her brother the curé, as follows: "You cannot imagine what pleasure you have given me by your zeal for the glory of the Sacred Heart. It is, I believe, one of the shortest ways of securing one's salvation."[2] To her brother Chrysostom she wrote: "You must now accomplish without fail what you have proposed. By so doing you will be giving me one of the greatest consolations I could have in this mortal life, for nothing can afford me so much joy as to see the Sacred Heart of Our Lord loved, honoured and glorified."[3]

Everything that related to the devotion to the Sacred Heart gave inexpressible joy to the heart of Margaret Mary; and an apostolic enthusiasm is the characteristic of the correspondence of this seraphic soul during the last years of her life. No labour

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 344, 351.
[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 365.
[3] *Ibid*, II, p. 359.

seems too great for her, if she can thereby make known the Heart of her God. One is almost astonished to see this contemplative soul becoming so active. But love is ecstatic, and seeks ever to go out of itself, to communicate itself to others.[1]

It was not in vain that Mother de Soudeilles received the little presents sent to her by her humble friend of Paray, on Sept. 15, 1686. Feeling interiorly convinced that she was responding to a heaven-sent inspiration, she set to work to collect all that she considered most conducive to the propagation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. To this end she drew up all that Father de la Colombière had written concerning it in his '*Retreat*,' to which she added the little Act of Consecration, an Act of Atonement to the Sacred Heart, together with the Litany of the Heart of Jesus, and that of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and ere long a little book of twelve pages was published at Moulins *by the Widow of Claude Vernay*, entitled: *Devotion to the Heart of Jesus, for the First Friday of each month.* One of the first to whom Mother de Soudeilles sent a copy was the Servant of God, to whom the unexpected present was a subject of both joy and consternation; for, according to her own words, enough could never be said of the Heart of Jesus, but always too much of herself. Thus, in quoting these passages from Father de la Colombière, and also the little Consecration, Mother de Soudeilles had by this very fact inflicted no small humiliation on this holy soul, who naïvely confided to Mother de Saumaise that she felt "considerable confusion" on that account, "but," she added, "may the will of God be done!"[2]

Unable hitherto to succeed in obtaining a plate of the picture of the Sacred Heart, Sister Margaret Mary had recourse once again to Mother de Saumaise, whom

[1] Cf. St. Denis the Areopagite. "*The Divine Names.*—" Chapter IV § XIII.

[2] Life and Writings II, pp. 354, 355.

Our Saviour had Himself designated as "having been appointed by Him to take the place of our good and holy Father de la Colombière in the establishment of the devotion to His Sacred Heart." [1]

Dijon was a centre of apostleship where the desire to glorify the Sacred Heart wrought wonders. Sister Jeanne Madeleine Joly received the order to make an etching of the picture of the Sacred Heart, and her hand being guided by love, she succeeded in producing, if not absolutely a masterpiece, at any rate a work of piety, which Margaret Mary received with ecstatic delight. "I cannot express to you my joy on receiving your etching, which is just what I desired." [2] As a matter of fact, the artist to whom the work of Sister Joly was submitted, found scarcely anything to correct in it. [3]

In January 1687, the Servant of God was again entrusted with the care of the Sisters of the Little Habit. However, being, ever more and more drawn to the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, she sought to procure some leisure time by asking a Sister to replace her in the afternoons of feast days, so that she might be free to prostrate herself before the altar, promising to offer half an hour's prayer for the intentions of the Sister. About that time she was again troubled with a whitlow on her finger, the intense pain of which she bore, as was her wont, in silence. It happened, however, that one of the children, perceiving that her Mistress was in the habit of rising every night, mentioned the fact to the Superioress. Mother Melin ordered Sister Margaret Mary to show her the finger, and expressed her astonishment that she had said nothing about it. "It is so trifling, dear Mother," replied

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 337, 338.

[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 356, note.

[3] It was from this etching of Sister Joly which was sent by Dijon to the first Monastery of Paris, that the latter had the first pictures of the Sacred Heart printed. This Monastery is still in possession of the plate.

Margaret Mary, "that it is not worth mentioning." The doctor, however, on being consulted, thought otherwise; he considered the case so serious that he found it necessary to lance the finger to the very bone. The patient sufferer neither moved nor gave utterance to a single groan during the painful operation, to the admiration of all present. The surgeon, seeing her apparently insensible to the pain he was daily obliged to inflict upon her when dressing the wound, could not understand such virtue, and remarked with a smile: "It is well to be a saint." [1] This unalterable peace and calm in the midst of all kinds of sufferings seems incomprehensible. The instructions which, according to the testimony of our Saint, she had received from Our Lord, solve the mystery. "He wished me to suffer all things in silence. . . . . He willed that I should await all from Him, and if it happened that I sought to procure myself some little consolation, fresh torments and desolation were the only alleviation which He permitted me to encounter. This I have always regarded as one of the greatest graces which my God has given me, together with that of not depriving me of the precious treasure of the Cross. . . . It was in these sentiments and in the midst of the delights of the Cross, that I exclaimed: What shall I render to the Lord for all that He hath rendered to me! O my God, how great is Thy loving kindness towards me, in thus permitting me to sit at the table of the Saints, and partake of the same food with which Thou dost feed them! Thou dost give me to eat abundantly of the delicious viands of Thy intimate and faithful friends, yes, even to me,

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, pp. 269, 270. In 1688 she again suffered in the same way, but this time she was cured by other than human skill. Writing to Mother de Saumaise of the graces obtained through the intercession of Father de la Colombière, she says: "I can assert the cure of a finger on which I had a gathering of the same kind as that which was lanced in several places last year." Life and Writings II, p. 401.

a wretched and miserable sinner." Then, without any transition, she gives vent to this seraphic utterance: "Ah! I do assure you, that without the Cross and the Blessed Sacrament I could not exist, nor could I bear the length of my exile!"[1]

On Good Friday, March 28, 1687, being filled with a yearning desire for the Eucharistic Bread, Margaret Mary thus addressed the Beloved of her soul: "My beloved Jesus, I would fain consume myself in my ardent desire for Thee, and not being able to possess Thee this day, I will not cease to yearn after Thee." Whereupon He deigned to console her with His sweet presence, saying: "Thy desire, My daughter, has penetrated so deeply into My Heart, that if I had not instituted this Sacrament of love, I would do so now in order to become thy food. I take such pleasure in being desired, that as often as a heart forms this desire, so often do I look lovingly upon it, to draw it to Myself."[2] Is not this perhaps the same grace which we find recorded in the Autobiography, but in a slightly different form? "One day when I was longing ardently for Him, my Divine Master presented Himself to me, when I was in the act of carrying away some sweepings, and addressed me thus: 'My daughter, I have witnessed thy sighs, and the desires of thy heart are so pleasing to Me, that if I had not instituted this Sacrament of love, I would do so now for thy sake, in order to have the pleasure of dwelling in thy soul and taking My repose in thy heart.' This filled me with such ardour, that I felt my soul transported with delight, to which I could find expression only in these words: O Love! Oh! the excess of God's love towards so miserable a creature!"[3] Besides these words, which were capable of transforming a whole life-time, Our Lord gave utterance to others no less beautiful, which were intended to maintain her in the conviction

[1] Autobiography, pp. 97, 98. [2] Life and Writings II, p. 364.
[3] Autobiography, pp. 105, 106.

that He was all in all, and she a mere nothing. "One day," she writes, "He said in an authoritative voice: 'I will render thee poor, vile and abject in thine own eyes, and I will annihilate thee so completely in thine own opinion, that I may be able to build upon thy nothingness.' These words made such an impression upon me, that I could not think of myself without horror, so full of miseries did I find myself."[1]

Our Lord had made known to her that He willed to employ her as a channel to pour out His graces in profusion over souls. This assurance suffices for us to give credence to the prodigious grace, the secret of which He is about to confide to her. "One Friday, during Holy Communion, He said these words to His unworthy servant, if she is not mistaken: 'I promise thee, in the exceeding mercy of My Heart, that Its all-powerful love will grant the grace of final repentance to all who shall communicate on the First Friday for nine consecutive months, that they shall not die in My displeasure, nor without receiving the Sacraments, for My Divine Heart will become their secure refuge in that last hour.'"[2] She repeats what she has heard. Some may perhaps object: "She did not understand; that could not have been said." Let us think otherwise, and believe that nothing is impossible to God, especially when He wills to manifest *the exceeding mercy of His Heart.*

In 1687, Mother Marie-Christine Melin, having been re-elected Superioress, proposed Sister Margaret Mary again as Assistant, and had the gratification of seeing her elected by the unanimous votes of the Community. But everything which raised her in the eyes of creatures was for this humble soul a heavy Cross, the more so, as, according to the testimony of her contemporaries, "the singular esteem and veneration they henceforth had for her sanctity, prevented her from finding any

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 364.
[2] *Ibid,* II, pp. 397, 398. Cf. I, p. 261.

exterior occasions of suffering."[1] Writing during the Lent of 1688, to one of her most intimate friends, Sister Félice Madeleine de la Barge, at Moulins, she says with all simplicity: "I must acknowledge with regard to the charges, that you cannot imagine how much I felt my own weakness on that occasion, through my want of submission, which made me play many parts in the hope of escaping the one I now hold, but all was to no purpose. Hence we must be abandoned and remain in a perfect forgetfulness of self, neither wishing nor desiring anything; we shall then find all things in God."[2] What admirable advice, what inflamed words were those which Sister de la Barge had the happiness of receiving direct from this privileged disciple of the Heart of Jesus! On one occasion the latter wrote to her: "I can say nothing else, except that the annihilation of yourself will raise you to union with your Sovereign Good. By forgetting yourself you will possess Him, and by abandoning yourself to Him, He will possess you."[3] And again, she writes: "We have only to love this Holy of Holies, to become holy; who then shall prevent us from being so, since we have a heart to love and a body to suffer! But alas, can one suffer when one loves? No, dear friend, there is no more suffering for those who have an ardent love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, since humiliations, contempt, contradictions and all that is most bitter to nature, are changed into love in this Adorable Heart, Which would fain be loved without the intermingling of other love. It desires to possess all, without reserve, and to effect everything in us without resistance on our part. Let us then abandon ourselves wholly to Its power; let us confide in It, and we shall see that It will infallibly employ those, who are to work out our perfection, in such a manner, that the process will soon be completed, provided we place no obstacle in the way."[4] And

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 204.
[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 391.
[3] *Ibid*, II, p. 432.
[4] *Ibid*, II, p. 473.

another time: "As to what concerns your entering into His Sacred Heart, what have you to fear, since He Himself invites you to take your rest there? Is It not the throne of mercy, where the most miserable are the most favourably received, provided that love presents them in the abyss of their misery? . . And if we are tepid, cold, impure and imperfect, is It not a consuming furnace in which we must be purified like gold in the crucible?"[1]

Our Lord had assured His servant that the graces she received would never hinder her from observing her Rules and obeying blindly. "My Divine Saviour made known to me that He had so subjected His graces to obedience, that were I to withdraw from it ever so little, He would withdraw from me with all His favours; in fine, that this Spirit Which guides me, and reigns so powerfully over me, would lead me to five things: to have an ardent love for my Saviour Jesus Christ; to obey perfectly, after the example of my Saviour Jesus Christ; to suffer unceasingly for the love of Jesus Christ; to wish to suffer, if possible, without its being perceived that I suffer; to have an insatiable thirst for Holy Communion, and for being before the Blessed Sacrament. It seems to me that up to now all these graces have produced these signal effects in me." What a sublime avowal! Thus, truth obliges the Saint to acknowledge that, her soul having offered no resistance to the divine action, all the predictions of Our Lord had been fully accomplished. As a consequence of this she immediately adds: "and in very truth I see more clearly than the day, that a life without the love of Jesus Christ is the greatest of all miseries."[2]

For some time past this humble Sister had felt drawn to ask, through the intercession of St. Francis of Sales,

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 410, 411.
[2] *Ibid*, I, pp. 267, 268.

all the graces necessary for her beloved Institute of the Visitation; and above all the perfection of union and charity, which are the fundamental virtues of every Religious Order. This request having been several times disregarded by Our Lord, she said one day: "My God, I will not leave Thee until Thou has granted me this grace; as long as I have any voice or any power to move, I will employ both in imploring it of Thee." To which Our Saviour replied: "I promise that I will grant thy request, if they do what I am about to command thee. Let each one examine herself seriously upon anything that may in any way serve as an obstacle to My grace, one of the greatest being a certain petty jealousy and envy of one another, together with a secret coldness which tends to repel charity, and renders My graces of no avail." St. Francis of Sales then said: "A true Daughter of the Visitation ought to be a living holocaust, after the example of Jesus Christ."[1] Such also was the language of Saint Jane de Chantal, who on another occasion said to her: "The true Daughters of the Visitation should rejoice only in the Cross and glory in humiliations, since they must triumph only through the Cross."[2]

One year on the Feast of the Visitation,[3] Margaret Mary was praying before the Blessed Sacrament with great fervour for the whole Order, but the divine Goodness appeared inflexible to her prayers. "Speak of that no more to Me," He said, "they do not hearken to My voice, and they destroy the foundations of the building. If they think to raise it on any other foundation, I will overthrow it." The Blessed Virgin finally pleaded the cause of the Visitation. The conflict between the Divine Son and His Blessed Mother was long, but in the end the latter was victorious. The devil was infuriated at this, and in order to give vent to his rage, he raised so fearful a tempest that the

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 171. [2] *Ibid*, II, pp. 158, 159.
[3] Perhaps in 1687.

church of the Monastery was in danger of being blown down; and twice tearing the curtains of the choir grating, he exclaimed: "It is thus that I would overthrow the Order of the Visitation, were it not supported by this massive pillar, against which I am powerless." [1] According to Mgr. Languet "the noise in the church was so terrific, that a Sister who was kneeling with Sister Margaret Mary before the Blessed Sacrament was so alarmed, that she rose in haste to leave the choir; but the Saint, calling her back, said with a calm and tranquil countenance: 'Fear nothing, it is all over, he will do no more.' This not only reassured the terrified Sister, but also gave her to understand that Sister Margaret Mary had been favoured with a vision." [2]

During her retreat of the same year, the grace of an extraordinary contrition was granted to the Servant of God. For five or six hours she ceased not to weep for her sins, but these burning tears were tears of love. Our Saviour, appearing to her, said: "My daughter, wilt thou sacrifice to Me the tears thou hast shed, in order therewith to wash the feet of My beloved sullied by following a stranger?" Then explaining to her the signification of His words, He told her that *His beloved* was the *Visitation*, which had entered into a purgatory, namely, the annual retreats, in order to be purified. "Give them, My daughter, this last warning from Me. Let each one enter into herself that she may profit by the grace which I will offer her through My Blessed Mother; for those who do not profit thereby will be as barren trees which bring forth no fruit." [3]

There is every reason to believe that the merciful warning was responded to, for on July 2, 1688, words

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 172, 173.
[2] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary. Edition Princeps, 1729, p. 291.
[3] Life and Writings II, p. 174.

of blessing only were heard. On that day, as Margaret Mary was kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, she beheld a vast space of indescribable beauty, in the centre of which the Sacred Heart appeared, as it were, upon a throne of flames. On one side was the Blessed Virgin, and on the other St. Francis of Sales and Father de la Colombière. The Daughters of the Visitation were also there, attended by their Guardian Angels. The Queen of Heaven spoke encouragingly to them saying: "Come, my beloved daughters, draw near;" then pointing to the Heart of her Divine Son, she added: "Behold the divine treasure which is specially manifested to you through the tender love of my Son for your Institute, which He regards as His beloved Benjamin. Hence it is that He is about to favour it beyond all others, by the possession of His Sacred Heart; and its members are not only to enrich themselves with this inexhaustible treasure, but they must also distribute the precious coin freely, in so far as it lies in their power, seeking to enrich everyone, without fear of its failing; for the more they shall take, the more they will find there." Then turning to Father de la Colombière, this good Mother said to him: "and you, too, faithful servant of my Son, you have a large share in this precious treasure; for if it is given to the Daughters of the Visitation to know it and to distribute it to others, it is reserved to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus to make known its value and utility."[1]

Sister Margaret Mary never lost sight of this community of privileges, gratuitously divided by the Sacred Heart between the Society of Jesus and the Order of the Visitation. Therefore, whenever Providence permitted her to have any communication with the Fathers of this holy Society, she always reminded them of their glorious mission. On August 10, 1689, she wrote as follows to Father Croiset: "At this

[1] Life and Writings II, pp. 405-407.

thought I fain would melt in thanksgiving and gratitude to this Divine Heart for the signal graces He vouchsafes to us, in willing to make use of us, to help towards making Him known, loved and honoured. He will reward with infinite blessings all who thus devote themselves to the utmost of their power according as they are inspired by Him. . . But although this treasure of love is a gift offered to all, and one to which everyone has a right, it has nevertheless remained hidden until now, when it is given more especially to the Sisters of the Visitation, since they are destined to honour the hidden life, so that, having been revealed to them, they may manifest and distribute it to others. It is reserved, however, to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus to make known the value and utility of this precious treasure, of which the more one takes, the more there is to take. It remains, therefore, for them to enrich themselves abundantly with all these graces and blessings, for it is through this efficacious means, which He offers them, that they will be enabled to acquit themselves perfectly, according to His desire, of the holy ministry of charity to which they are destined. This Divine Heart will impart the sweet unction of His charity so powerfully to their words, that like to a two-edged sword they will penetrate the most hardened hearts, rendering them susceptible to the love of this Divine Heart, and the most obdurate sinners will thereby be brought to salutary repentance. Lastly, it is by this means that He wills to impart to the Order of the Visitation and to the Society of Jesus an abundance of these divine treasures of peace and salvation, provided that they render to Him what He expects of them, viz: a homage of love, honour and praise, and also that they work according to their power for the establishment of His reign in the hearts of men. To this end He expects much from your holy Society."

She then goes on to make known to Father Croiset

what the Heart of Jesus desires from him in particular. First and before all, it is his own sanctification, and she continues : " according to the measure of your work thereat, this Divine Heart will sanctify you with Its own holiness." In the same letter she insinuates that the Sacred Heart seeks " empty hearts, that He may fill them with the sweet unction of His charity to consume and transform them wholly into Himself." " He wants minds that are humble and submissive," she adds, " without any desire but that of accomplishing His good pleasure."

She gives at the same time a brief summary, so to speak, of the promises which the Sacred Heart had made to her concerning those who consecrate themselves to It, noting particularly amongst other things : " that He will never let them perish, and that He will be their assured refuge against the snares of their enemies, especially at the hour of their death. . . Further, He will unite families which are at variance, and will protect those who are in any necessity ; He will pour out the sweet unction of His burning charity over all religious Communities who honour It, and place themselves under Its special protection ; He will keep all their hearts united, so as to form but one with His, and will turn away from them the strokes of divine justice. . . ." [1]

Whenever Margaret Mary heard that devotion to the Sacred Heart had been introduced either in public or in private, she was filled with joy. Nevertheless she was fully persuaded that she was an obstacle to its diffusion, which she ardently yearned to see universal. It is worthy of note that Sister Alacoque frequently asserted that the diocese of Autun would be the last to honour the Sacred Heart, " because she believed

[1] Letter to Father Croiset, August 10, 1689. Taken from a photograph of the Autograph which is preserved in the Monastery of the Visitation of Boulogne. Life and Writings II, p. 529. passim.

herself to be an obstacle thereto."[1] Although the reason she alleged was an illusion and the result of her humility, the prediction was realized. Less favoured than most of the other Monasteries, it was not until 1713, that Paray succeeded in obtaining ecclesiastical permission to solemnize the Feast of the Sacred Heart. A considerable number of churches had elsewhere been authorized by their pastors to adopt this cherished devotion, but it was only in 1721 that Mgr. d'Hallencourt de Droménil, Bishop of Autun, at last gave orders that this Feast should be celebrated throughout his diocese.

Towards the end of the year 1688, a day of the purest happiness dawned for the apostle of the Heart of Jesus, when the chapel projected on June 21, 1686, was at last completed. The zeal displayed by Mother Melin in erecting a sanctuary, where His Sacred Heart was to be adored, was so agreeable to Our Lord, that He promised she should die in an act of pure love. This was truly a sweet and comforting message for the Saint to transmit to her. The picture, which was to be exposed in this new sanctuary, had been executed, through the care of Mother de Saumaise, according to the miniature sent to Mother Greyfié, and was to the perfect satisfaction of her former daughter, who in a letter to Mother de Saumaise says : " I cannot express the sentiments of holy joy which filled my heart at the sight of your picture which I shall never be tired of looking at, so exquisitely beautiful do I find it."[2]

Nothing now remained but to open this little chapel

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 276.

[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 390. This picture, which was taken from the Monastery of Paray by the revolutionists, is preserved in the parish church of Semur-en-Brionnais. Having had the happiness of obtaining it, this church has ever steadfastly refused to part with its treasure ; the Visitation of Paray has merely a facsimile of it, which is the principal ornament of the said chapel in the garden.

after it had been solemnly blessed ; and the day fixed for the ceremony was September 7, 1688, which was held as a festival day not only by the Sisters, but also by the whole town. The society of priests, called *les Sociétaires du Mépart*,[1] and the curés of the neighbouring parishes assembled in the parish church, and walked in procession to the Monastery, where, entering the enclosure, they passed on to the chapel erected in the north-east corner of the garden. They were followed by large numbers of the faithful, whose entrance it was impossible to prevent. The ceremony commenced at 1 p.m., and lasted till 3 o'clock. But the contemplation or, to speak more correctly, the ecstasy of Margaret Mary was of longer duration. Kneeling in a corner of the chapel, she was wholly wrapt in God, and neither saw nor heard anything, for she was more in heaven than on earth. This was no small disappointment to many of those present, who had hoped for the privilege of speaking with her, but who were obliged to leave before she came to herself, for who could go counter to the words of the heavenly Spouse : " Stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please."[2]

They found means, however, later on of being compensated for this, for we read in the deposition of Sister de Farges, that priests, religious, preachers and others came in their difficulties to consult Sister Margaret Mary, and on leaving the parlour after their interview with her, they were wont to exclaim with delight : " We have just seen the Saint."[3] Sister de la Garde asserts that she " had seen several persons, both priests

[1] This was the name given to a society of priests, all natives of Paray, and attached to the parish church. The Society numbered as many as 25 members.

[2] Ne suscitetis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam quoadusque ipsa velit. Cant. II, 7.

[3] Life and Writings I, p. 536. Deposition of Sister Claude Rosalie de Farges. Process 1715.

and seculars, address themselves to the venerable Sister in their many troubles, and they invariably went away consoled, declaring that it did them good to hear the Servant of God converse on the mysteries of our holy Faith with so much facility and heavenly unction." [1]

It was an untold joy for Margaret Mary to see, that not only did individual Sisters visit the little chapel but it was also the object of the pious pilgrimages of the Community, and especially on the First Friday of each month, when all went in procession singing the Litany of the Sacred Heart, and renewed there the Acts of Reparation and Consecration. On beholding this consoling progress of the devotion, she had every reason to repeat one of her favourite aspirations of love to the Sacred Heart: "It would be a sweet pleasure to me to be annihilated in order that It may reign." [2]

Despite her ardent desire to remain hidden, Sister Margaret Mary, at the period at which we have now arrived, had become the object of universal veneration. Sister Marie Lazare Dusson, who had the privilege of conversing frequently with this earthly seraph, thought to herself, as she one day heard the life of St. Catherine of Sienna read aloud in the refectory: "Oh! If only I could see someone like her I should indeed esteem

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 543, 544. Deposition of Sister Anne Elizabeth de la Garde Marzac. Process 1715.

[2] *Ibid*, II, p. 390. This chapel in the enclosure was always regarded with love and respect by the Sisters of Paray. On the occasion of the celebrations following the Beatification of the Servant of God, June 22, 1865, her relics, borne in triumphal procession, rested for a few brief moments in this beloved Sanctuary. It has recently been completely restored, and the interior considerably embellished, in honour of her who had made it the place of her predilection. Margaret Mary delighted to retire there to pray and implore the favours of the Sacred Heart for those whom she loved. To Sister de la Barge, who had commended herself to her prayers, she writes: "I made a visit to our chapel of the Sacred Heart for you." Life and Writings II, pp. 432, 433.

myself happy!" Scarcely had this thought crossed her mind when an interior voice said to her: "Behold there is My beloved, to whom I have imparted graces and favours no less considerable." She raised her eyes, and they fell on Sister Margaret Mary who was at that time Assistant, and was seated opposite to her. At the same moment she experienced an unmistakable impression of grace, by which she understood that this was the soul of whom the Holy Ghost rendered this testimony.[1]

The mere contact with this beloved of the Lord had something miraculous about it. In the year 1689 Sister Anne Marie Aumônier de Chalanforges, a postulant for the rank of lay Sister, had the misfortune to injure her leg while cutting wood. For some time she bore the pain in silence, fearing that if it became known she would be sent away; but a second accident having reopened the wound, it became impossible for the young postulant to conceal her sufferings any longer. Full of confidence in the merits of Sister Margaret Mary, of whom she had heard such extraordinary things, she thought that if only she could touch the hem of her habit she would be cured. Consequently one day when Sister Margaret Mary was near the fire, she knelt down, as if to pick up something, but in reality it was to apply the hem of Margaret Mary's habit to her leg. From that hour she became gradually better and in a short time was completely cured.

In the seclusion of her Convent, the apostle of the Sacred Heart had yet to carry out a last order of capital importance, ere her mission was accomplished. The devotion to the Sacred Heart was one day represented to her under the form of a beautiful tree, which God had destined from all eternity to take its origin and cast its roots in the Institute of the Visitation. The fruit of

[1]Life and Writings III, p. 377. Life of Sister Marie Lazare Dusson.

this tree is the fruit of life and eternal salvation. Everyone may gather of it according as he wills and desires. The Divine Heart wished that the Sisters of the Visitation should distribute the fruit of this sacred tree liberally to all who desire to partake thereof, without fear of its ever failing.[1] "But," she continues in a letter to Mother de Saumaise, "He will not stop there; He has yet greater designs, to be accomplished only by His almighty power which can do all that He wills."[2] Then with as much candour as though she were relating the simplest thing on earth, she tells her the messages which she had received from Our Lord for the King of France. "Make known to the eldest son of My Sacred Heart" . . . and she goes on to state briefly the desires of the Heart of Jesus: He yearns to reign in the King's palace, but especially in his heart. He wishes to be emblazoned on his standard and engraven on his arms, that they may be victorious. He would fain see him raise a temple in which the image of His Sacred Heart may be exposed for the veneration of the King himself and of his whole court. Finally, "He has chosen him for His faithful friend, that he may obtain from the Holy See the authorization for a Mass in Its honour, together with all the other privileges which should accompany the devotion to His Sacred Heart."[3] She then unfolds the whole plan, such as it had been supernaturally suggested to her: how God had chosen the Rev. Father de la Chaise to make this known to the King, and that it was to be through the initiative of Mother de Saumaise that this eminent Jesuit was to act, whilst Margaret Mary herself was to remain hidden. "I ask you always to keep the secret of whatsoever I tell you."[4] Mother de Saumaise, who never disregarded anything that came from Sister

[1] Cf. Life and Writings II, pp. 437, 438.
[2] Cf. *Ibid*, II, p. 438.
[3] *Ibid*, II, p. 457.
[4] *Ibid*, II, p. 438.

Margaret Mary, did not hesitate to undertake even this mission. She felt drawn to employ as intermediary Mother Marie-Louise Croiset, Superioress of the Monastery of Chaillot. Thither had fled for refuge Marie Beatrice d'Este, the unfortunate Queen of England, to whom, when Duchess of York, Father de la Colombière acted as Chaplain. Surely under such favourable circumstances they would succeed in reaching Louis XIV. Did these efforts meet with the desired success? Much may be conjectured about this great enterprise; there are however no documents extant, relative to the negotiations on this matter. Did the King remain in ignorance of the heaven-sent message? Or if acquainted with it, had he not the courage to obey? God alone knows. Nevertheless, after-events seem to point rather to the latter supposition. Had there been no traditions in the royal family concerning the message to Louis XIV, the vow of Louis XVI would not have contained clauses so explicit as the following:— To take the necessary steps for the establishment of a solemn festival in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is to be celebrated in perpetuity throughout France on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi; to consecrate to the Sacred Heart his person, his family and his kingdom; to erect and adorn at his own expense a chapel or an altar to the Sacred Heart in a church of his own choice. It is encouraging to recall to mind these words of the Saint: "One thing which greatly consoles me, is the hope that in exchange for the bitterness which this Divine Heart suffered in the palaces of the great during the ignominies of His Passion, this devotion will *in time*[1] be received with magnificence. On questioning Him upon these matters, which to all appearance would be so difficult to obtain, I seemed to hear these words: 'Believest thou that I can do it? If thou dost believe, thou

[1] Italicized by the Editor.

shalt behold the power of My Heart in the magnificence of My love.' "[1]

Be that as it may, it is very certain that two centuries later, France was mindful of the desire of the King of kings. She consecrated herself to the Sacred Heart, and the magnificent Sanctuary which overlooks her capital bears witness before heaven and earth that she proclaims herself a penitent and devoted nation: *Gallia pœnitens et devota!*

Since the Great War she loves besides to proclaim herself a grateful nation: "*Christo ejusque Sacratissimo Cordi, Gallia pœnitens, devota et grata.*"—In fact, France cannot fail to recognise that she owes her victory to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Who endowed her soldiers with such valour and heroism, in order to make her cause triumph. And for this reason, immediately after this tragedy, the Consecration of the Basilica of the "*Vœu National,*" on the hill of Montmartre, assumed a character of splendour and solemnity which surpassed all expectations. His Holiness Benedict XV sent as Legate His Eminence Cardinal Vico. The celebrations were magnificent. Our Saint had her place of honour there, too, for, while eloquent voices spoke of her virtues and the grandeur of her mission as apostle of the Sacred Heart, her relics were deposited, not only in the altar of her own chapel, but also in the High Altar of the Basilica, together with those of the glorious martyr St. Denis. What would the humble Margaret of Paray have said if, in 1689, the veil of the future had been raised, and she had read this consoling page in the national story of France!

But let us return to the last years of Saint Margaret Mary here below. In the year 1689, Father Croiset had been providentially led to make some additions to Sister Joly's little book on the devotion to the Sacred Heart, and had it printed at Lyons by Horace Molin, who took upon himself all the costs. On hearing of this, Sister

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 429.

Margaret Mary wrote to the young Jesuit, August 10, 1689: "It seems to me, that Our Lord wishes me to tell you, in His name, that this beginning is so pleasing to Him, that He intends to bestow upon you the graces He had destined for another,[1] who, on account of his many occupations, excused himself from doing what you have done, and what Our Lord desires, if I am not mistaken, that you should continue to do, if only you have sufficient courage to persevere, despite all the obstacles and contradictions which Satan will raise to prevent the accomplishment of what He asks of you. He will Himself be your mainstay and will not permit that any necessary means should be wanting to you."[2] It is therefore evident, that what Father Croiset had done was but a *commencement*; and that the Sacred Heart desired *something more*. But how was he to write of this Divine Heart without having conversed with her to whom Its secrets had been revealed? Consequently Father Croiset expressed the wish to have a personal interview with Sister Margaret Mary; and as his Superior happened to be Father Antoine Billet, uncle of Sister Claude Margaret, a devoted friend of Margaret Mary, it was not difficult for the young Jesuit Father to obtain the necessary permission to go to Paray. He set out towards the end of the year 1689, accompanied by Father Claude de Villette, and both expected wonders from the interview. On their arrival in the parlour, however, they began to think that they had been deceived by all the marvellous things they had heard of this poor nun, in whose presence they were, and who appeared so humble and reserved that she scarcely ventured to answer their questions. Could it be possible that she was able to read the innermost depths of the heart? They were inclined to regret having

[1] Father François Froment S. J.

[2] Letter to Father Croiset, August 10, 1689. Life and Writings II, p. 530.

come so far to see a person who would scarcely speak to them. The following morning, however, they felt urged to return, but not together. This time the Saint gave to each the information he required, and they withdrew, not merely satisfied, but astonished to find so much power, unction and penetration in the words of a humble Religious, and acknowledging that God alone could communicate to her such lights. This conference was decisive and the devotion to the Sacred Heart numbered two more apostles. "From that hour," write her contemporaries, "they kept up a correspondence with her, especially Father Croiset," [1] who had the happiness of being ordained priest towards the end of Lent 1690, and of celebrating one of his first Masses, if not the first, on Maundy Thursday, March 23rd.

On that day, or during the night between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Our Lord showed a heavy Cross to His beloved disciple, which she accepted, without at first understanding its meaning. But hearing shortly after that her name was to be placed on the catalogue at the coming election, she felt constrained to say to her Divine Master: "Is it possible, O my God, that Thou shouldst permit a creature such as I am to be placed at the head of the Community? I beseech of Thee to remove this Cross from me; I am willing to submit to any other." Our Lord granted her prayer, and at the Ascension of 1690, Mother Catherine Antoinette de Lévy Châteaumorand was elected Superioress, to the extreme delight of Sister Margaret Mary, whose first request was that she might be deposed from the charge of Assistant. But Our Saviour did not approve of this request, and said to her: "What, My daughter, I yielded to thy desire, and thou wilt not overcome thyself for My sake!" [2] Upon which the humble Sister went immediately to her Mother Superior to ask pardon for having thus manifested her own will, assuring her that she was ready to submit

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 302. [2] *Ibid*, I, p. 272.

to whatever might be required of her. She was therefore left in her charge "to the great happiness of the Sisters, who had recourse to her with perfect confidence."

It now became evident that God gave the Community a presentiment that they would not much longer enjoy the precious treasure which they then possessed. Her contemporaries tell us that Sister Margaret Mary had "many lights and graces" for the consolation of the "Sisters in their troubles," and that each one, "with permission, made known her sufferings to her."[1] One can almost picture to oneself the touching scene: these Sisters opening their hearts to the confidante of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who not only consoled them in their present sufferings, but her penetrating eye would see into the future, and at times she would foretell to one or other of the Sisters a certain Cross which awaited her, instructing her at the same time how she should bear it. Sister Jeanne Françoise Chalon bore testimony to this, when, in the Process of 1715, she affirmed that the venerable Sister had foretold certain trials that she was to encounter in the distant future, indicating to her at the same time the manner in which she should act on that occasion. Although there were no signs then of such troubles and Sister Jeanne Françoise could not believe the warning, nevertheless all was realized in the way Sister Margaret Mary had foretold."[2]

Even as a traveller who has attained the summit of a high mountain no longer hears the sounds in the valley beneath, nor thinks of the dangers he has undergone in the ascent, but is wrapt in the contemplation of the heavens and the splendours of the horizon which are unfolded to his wondering gaze, so this predestined soul, having reached the radiant heights of

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 273.

[2] *Ibid*, I. p. 551. Deposition of Sister Jeanne Françoise Chalon. Process of 1715.

divine union, heeds no more the sounds of earth. She sees only the Heart of her God, and the infinite horizons of His love. All desires, even the most holy, have ceased for her. Mother de Lévy Châteaumorand, seeing her so enfeebled, withdrew the permission for the Holy Hour, and also for other austerities which she was wont to practise. To quote the words of Sister Marie Lazare Dusson: "Our Mother said to me shortly before the death of the Servant of God: 'Sister, you have a great respect for Sister Margaret Mary, but you will esteem her much more when I tell you what I have just done. I ordered her to bring me all her instruments of penance, disciplines, hair shirts, etc., which she immediately did, and they are now in my cupboard, nor do I intend returning them to her again.'" To which the said Sister replied: "Mother, we are all grateful to Your Charity for having done so; for these are the cause of her continual illnesses."[1] The Saint now began openly to foretell her approaching end. "I shall not live much longer, for I have nothing more to suffer; our dear Mother takes too much care of me."[2] And again she says with still more precision: "I shall undoubtedly die this year, that I may not hinder the great fruit which Our Lord intends to produce by means of a book on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus."[3]

This was the book edited by Father Croiset.[4] It consisted of 106 pages, and was published in 1691. Containing, as it did, a brief sketch of the life of the Servant of God, it gave greater weight and authority

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 554. Deposition of Sister Marie Lazare Dusson. Process 1715.

[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 315. [3] *Ibid*, I, p. 273.

[4] "Devotion to the Sacred Heart of our Saviour Jesus Christ," by a Father of the Society of Jesus. A new and enlarged edition. Lyons. To be had of Antony and Horace Molin, opposite the College. M.DC.XCI. With the approbation and license of His Majesty the King.

to other similar works, and contributed much towards making the new devotion known.

Feeling that her end was near, Sister Margaret Mary wished to prepare herself for the coming of her heavenly Spouse by a retreat of forty days that she might thereby discover whence came that vehement desire which caused her to long unceasingly to meet her God. She commenced this extraordinary retreat on her forty-third birthday, the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, July 22, 1690. She chose the Sacred Heart of Jesus for her abode during those forty days. "I place my entire confidence in Him," she writes, "as being the sole support of all my hopes.[1] After having confided to Him all my interests, I experienced an admirable peace beneath His Sacred Feet, where He kept me for a considerable time, annihilated, as it were, in the abyss of my nothingness, waiting for Him to pronounce judgment on this miserable criminal. . . 'Thou knowest well, my Divine Master, that I am utterly unable to pay my debts. Put me in prison, I consent thereto, provided it be that of Thy Sacred Heart; and when I am therein, keep me a close captive, bound by the chains of Thy love, until I have paid all that I owe Thee; and as I shall never be able to do this, I would wish never to be released therefrom.'"[2]

She was penetrated with these sentiments when the time came for the annual retreats. Speaking one day to Sister Catherine Augustine Marest, her devoted infirmarian who had so often tended her in times of sickness, she said: "It is now my turn to enter into solitude, but it will be for the great retreat."[3]

On the eve of the day on which she was to begin her retreat, she fell ill and was compelled to take to her bed. Dr. Billet, who held Sister Margaret Mary in

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 286. Cf. II, p. 204.
[2] *Ibid*, I, pp. 287, 289. Cf. II, pp. 205, 206.
[3] *Ibid*, I, p. 514. Deposition of Sister Catherine Augustine Marest. Process 1715.

singular esteem, was immediately summoned. For some time past this worthy physician had regarded her maladies as resulting from divine love, for which, he said, he knew no remedy. On examining her this time he found no alarming symptoms, and appeared so confident of the case that "he laid a wager on her recovery."[1] During the first days she was troubled with a fear of the judgments of God, but after Confession, her fear gave place to a loving confidence, and she was consumed with an ardent love and a yearning desire to go to her God.[2] The sick Sister persisted in her prediction that she was nearing her end. "On being assured by the doctor that she would not die, she replied that it was better he should say what was not true than that she should do so."[3]

She was indeed so convinced of her approaching death that she earnestly begged for Holy Viaticum; but as no danger was anticipated it was not deemed expedient to accede to her request. She then asked that she might at least be allowed to receive Holy Communion, as she was still fasting. This request being granted, she received her Lord and her God with seraphic fervour, being fully persuaded that it was for the last time. This was on the 16th of October.

Observing that she suffered greatly, a sister who was present offered to procure her some relief. Margaret Mary thanked her, adding that the time that still remained was far too precious to lose a single moment thereof. She did indeed suffer much, but it was not enough to satisfy her intense craving for suffering, in which she found her delight. To live and to die upon the Cross seemed so sweet to her, that in spite of her ardent desire to enjoy the presence of God, she would willingly have remained in that state until the day of

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 554, 555. Deposition of Sister Marie Lazare Dusson. Process 1715.
[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 307.
[3] *Ibid*, I, p. 313.

judgment if such had been the divine good pleasure.[1] During the night which was to be her last, Sister Margaret Mary was attended by her former novice, Sister Marie Nicole de la Faige des Claines, who during the whole night was the privileged witness of the transports of love with which her blessed soul was inflamed, and to which she gave utterance in quotations from the Psalms and other parts of Holy Scripture, or in spontaneous ejaculations.

Her loving and faithful heart had not forgotten to say a last farewell to *her little Aloysius Gonzaga.* The very day on which she was taken ill, Sister Margaret Mary sent for her saying : " Come and see me, my dear Sister, for I shall die of this illness, and we shall not have very long to be together."[2]

God is a consuming fire,[3] and therefore He willed that, before admitting this faithful spouse to the eternal Communion, she should pass through a final purification. Thus it was that the last day of this predestined soul had its terrors as well as its ineffable consolations. She was suddenly assailed with a terrible fear of the judgments of God, and trembling all over, she humbled and annihilated herself before her Crucifix, and, with sighs and groans, repeated over and over again : " *Mercy, my God, mercy !*" Even as the ripe corn bends down before the tempest, so Margaret Mary bowed for the last time beneath the all-powerful Hand of God. But the divine Sun re-appeared and the soul of the dying Sister exulted in the mercies of the Sacred Heart. On regaining her peace and serenity once more she exclaimed : " *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo !*" Being oppressed with fever, she could no longer remain in bed ; and it became necessary to raise and support her in order that she could breathe. She

[1] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 292.

[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 550. Deposition of Sister Marie Nicole de la Faige des Claines. Process 1715.

[3] Deus tuus ignis consumens est. Deut. IV. 24.

was heard to say repeatedly : " Alas, I burn, I burn ! What a consolation it would be if it were with divine love ! but I have never known what it is to love God perfectly." Then turning to the Sisters who were near, she said : " Ask pardon for me, and love Him with all your heart in reparation for the moments in which I have not done so. What happiness it is to love God ! Ah, what happiness ! Love then this Love, but love Him perfectly !"[1] In the midst of this foretaste of Paradise, a sudden fear overclouded the soul of Margaret Mary, namely, that of not remaining hidden and buried in eternal oblivion after her death. She made her Superioress promise never to speak of anything she had confided to her that could possibly turn to her advantage. When the glory of God is concerned such promises are not binding. Nor was this all ; for calling Sister de Farges to her bedside, Margaret Mary said to her : " Write, I beseech you, immediately, my dear Sister, to the Rev. Father Rolin, and ask him to burn my letters and to keep inviolably the secret which I have so often asked of him."[2] A little later she said to the same Sister : " I beg of you, Sister, to burn the copy book which you will find in the cupboard and which was written by order of my Confessor, Father Rolin, who forbade me to destroy it myself before he had examined it."[3] Now God permitted that the humility of the Saint should prevent her from realizing that Sister de Farges was the last person to whom she should address herself for such a service. In her veneration for Sister Margaret Mary, she took care not to obey her on this occasion, but persuaded her to give the key of the cupboard to the Mother Superior, and to make a sacrifice of all else into the hands of God;

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 293.
[2] *Ibid*, I, p. 294.
[3] *Ibid*, I, p. 537. Deposition of Sister Claude Rosalie de Farges. Process of 1715.

"to which she consented, although it cost her not a little."[1]

Providence had ordained that posterity should not be deprived of the treasures of grace which were contained in that little book. Now that the writer is about to appear before God, let us admire the truth of those words addressed to her by her Sovereign Lord, when this truly humble soul sought to be dispensed from the obedience imposed on her, of revealing the many marvels of love wrought in her favour: "Continue, My daughter, continue; thou wilt gain neither more nor less for all thy repugnances. My will must be accomplished. . . Write fearlessly all that I shall dictate to thee and I promise to infuse therein the unction of My grace, that I may be glorified thereby. I require this of thee, in the first place, to show thee that I take pleasure in rendering useless all the precautions which I permitted thee to take, in order to hide the profusion of graces, with which I was pleased to enrich so poor and miserable a creature as thyself. Thou must ever bear this in mind, that thou mayest render Me continual thanks. Secondly, I wish to teach thee that thou must not appropriate these graces to thyself, nor be sparing in the distribution of them to others, for I have willed to make use of thy heart as a channel for conveying them to souls according to My designs, many of whom shall be saved by this means from the abyss of perdition as I will show thee hereafter. And thirdly, I wish to show that I am the Eternal Truth and cannot deceive; that I am faithful to My promises, and that the graces I have bestowed on thee will be able to withstand every kind of trial and investigation."[2] How many times, when writing these sublime lines, did Margaret Mary pause, and beseech Our Lord

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 537. Deposition of Sister Claude Rosalie de Farges. Process of 1715.

[2] Autobiography, pp. 35, 36.

that they might be seen by none, save only by him to whom she was to submit them for examination. "O my God, grant this consolation to Thy miserable slave," she exclaimed. But she was forced to add: "At the same time I received the following answer to my request: 'Abandon all to My good pleasure, and let Me accomplish My designs; interfere not in any way, for I will have care of all.'"[1]

Did not Our Lord, by the above words, pledge Himself to preserve for His Church, what we may venture to call, a *priceless jewel* in the treasury of the writings of the Saints? Such is the title which can justly be given to the "Autobiography" of the Virgin of Paray.

But let us return to her bed of suffering. The Mother Superior had communicated the sad news of her illness to her family. On being told of this, Sister Margaret Mary replied that she would not see anyone. "*Let us die and sacrifice all to God.*"[2] This was one of her last words.

Towards five o'clock in the evening of October 17, she became so weak that death appeared imminent. Once again she begged to receive Holy Viaticum, but as she seemed to revive a little, the doctor persisted in saying that she could well wait until the next day. "Fortunately, I have anticipated this," she said to Sister de Farges; "I foresaw that they would not believe me to be so ill, so the last time I received Holy Communion, God granted me the grace to receive Him in Viaticum."[3]

Then with an ever increasing desire for heaven, she exclaimed: "*Lætatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus.* Yes, I hope that through the mercy of the Sacred Heart, we shall enter into the

[1] Autobiography, p. 91.

[2] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary by Mgr. Languet. Edition Princeps 1729, p. 328.

[3] Life and Writings I, p. 540. Deposition of Sister Claude Rosalie de Farges. Process 1715.

house of the Lord." The Mother Superior, having retired to take a little rest, was speedily recalled by the Sister Infirmarian. A Sister who was present thought it was not necessary, but the dying Sister replied: "*Let her do so, it is time.*" [1] She then asked to receive Extreme Unction and the priest was immediately summoned. The Superioress wished to send for the doctor as well, but Margaret Mary prevented her saying: "Mother, I have no longer need of anything but God alone, and to be hidden for ever in the Heart of Jesus Christ." [2]

The Community now quickly assembled to recite the prayers for the Recommendation of the Departing Soul, and although Sister Péronne Rosalie de Farges and Sister Françoise Rosalie de Verchère were not among the first to enter the infirmary, Providence nevertheless permitted that they should find themselves placed, one on each side of the dying Saint, and thus was fulfilled the prediction which she had made to each in particular, that she would breathe her last in their arms.

As the priest was finishing the fourth unction, she uttered the Holy Name of Jesus, and as she did so, her pure soul went to be for ever united to her Lord and her God. A supernatural beauty overspread those lifeless features, an aureola seemed already to encircle her brow, and the Angels, her *divine associates*, could well sing around her mortal remains: "Humility goeth before Glory." [3]

Doctor Billet entered the room just as she breathed her last, and appeared much surprised, for according to human science there had been nothing to lead him to suppose that death was so near, and he was firmly persuaded that divine love was the cause of it. This holy

[1] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary by Mgr. Languet. Edition Princeps p. 329.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 329.

[3] Gloriam praecedit humilitas. Prov. xv., 33.

death took place between 7 and 8 o'clock, on Tuesday, October 17, 1690.[1]

The Community was plunged into the deepest sorrow; and maybe some shed bitter tears as they said to themselves: "Alas! how was it that we were so late in recognizing her to be what she was! . ." Her contemporaries assert that the deceased left "a sweet perfume of sanctity."[2] All who drew near to that body, as it lay stiff and cold in death, felt their hearts filled with untold peace and happiness; for the soul which was now plunged in God shed over it a ray of heavenly light.

No sooner was the news of her death known in the town, than it was regarded by all as a public calamity.[3] "The Saint is dead!" was the universal cry, and even the little children took up the refrain, exclaiming in their turn: "The Saint of the Holy Maries is dead."[4]

As soon as the church doors were opened on the following morning the people crowded in, all anxious to gaze once more upon the venerated features of her whose mortal remains were exposed in the nuns' choir. Each one brought some article of piety in the hope that it might be allowed to touch the holy remains. Two Sisters were constantly employed in this consoling occupation; but so great was the concourse, that being unable to suffice, others had to be called to their assistance. Added to this everyone begged for some little relic, either a small piece of her habit, or some few words in the hand-writing of the deceased. So exact, however, had been the poverty of this true Religious, that after her death nothing was found in her cell but her Rule and her discipline.

[1] The part of the infirmary in which the Servant of God breathed her last has been transformed into an oratory. It is a little sanctuary vividly recalling memories of the Saint.

[2] Life and Writings I, p. 296.

[3] Cf. Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary, by Mgr. Languet. Edition Princeps p. 331.

[4] Cf. Life and Writings I, p. 308.

" Never, since the foundation of the Monastery, had such a concourse of people,—priests, religious, and persons of all ranks—been seen at the funeral service of any Sister, as at that of the venerable Sister Alacoque." [1] The ceremony took place towards evening, on October 18, when the body was placed in the vault beneath the Sisters' choir. The ecclesiastics, who on this occasion were admitted inside the enclosure, followed the pious example of the faithful. " Everyone," writes Mgr. Languet, " wished to carry away some relic of the holy Religious ; nay, they even went so far as to cut off pieces of her habit and veil, and one even took the little Crucifix, which was in her hand, and refused to return it, saying that it was the most precious treasure he could possess and bequeath to his family." [2]

A member of the Community, Sister Marie-Suzanne de Bisefrand, who had written to Father Rolin, concerning her whose glory was so manifest, received the following answer : " I am greatly obliged to you for the details you have given me in your last two letters concerning the very venerable Sister Alacoque, whom God causes to be thus honoured upon earth. This is undoubtedly a sign of her triumph and of her powerful intercession with God in heaven. I praise and bless the Lord for it. Revering her as I do, you can easily believe that I now join in paying her the honour which I owe her. She honoured me with her friendship and her confidence whilst on earth, and I doubt not she will assist me now by her prayers in heaven. I count much upon them, but in order to obtain them we must, both you and I, imitate her virtues of which we have been the witnesses. It is by this means that we shall merit her protection. She was very faithful to God,

[1] Life and Writings I, p. 548. Deposition of Sister Anne Elizabeth de la Garde Marzac. Process 1715.

[2] Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary. Edition Princeps p. 332.

never refusing Him anything He asked of her ; she was extremely mortified, and found her delight in suffering. No one could be more humble, more charitable, more perfectly obedient, nor more united to God. Yes, in very truth, such was this great Servant of God." [1]

The confidence of the faithful in her intercession was frequently rewarded by extraordinary graces, both spiritual and temporal.

Thanks to the zeal of Mgr. Languet, who was at that time Vicar General of Autun, afterwards Bishop of Soissons and Archbishop of Sens, the Cause of her Beatification was introduced in 1715. Regardless of the fury and sarcasm of the Jansenists, Mgr. Languet, who was a member of the Academy, devoted his talents to writing the " Life of the Venerable Mother Margaret Mary." The book appeared in 1729. No little courage was needed to touch upon *such* things at *such* a time. His friends urged him to refrain at least from affixing his signature to so compromising a work. But Sister de Farges, who was more courageous, and above all, prompted by more supernatural motives, wrote " in her simple, childlike way," to Mgr. Languet that " God the Father permitted that the Name of Jesus, His Son, should be affixed to the Cross, and therefore His Lordship should not refuse to put his at the commencement of this book, despite all the crosses and annoyances to which he might thereby expose himself." [2] The worthy prelate followed this advice, and if on the one hand the publication of the book drew down upon the author the persecution of Jansenists and philosophers, the avowed enemies of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, it obtained for him, on the other hand, abundant blessings from this Adorable Heart.

Our Lord took care that the name of His beloved disciple should be handed down with honour to succeed-

[1] Life and Writings I, pp. 610, 611. Cf. I, p. 303.

[2] *Ibid*, III, p. 431. Life of Sister Claude Rosalie Marque de Farges.

ing ages. He also provided that her precious remains should be preserved, and that after the troubles of the Revolution, they should be restored, by means of the Sisters of Margaret Mary, to the same Monastery in which she had so heroically corresponded to the grace of her vocation and fulfilled her particular mission. These holy relics never left Paray, not even during the Reign of Terror. When on September 23, 1792, the Community was dispersed, they were entrusted to Sister Marie Anne Félicité Lorenchet, whose relations lived near the monastery. But being obliged to go to Beaune, her native town, Sister Marie Thérèse Petit was left as guardian of the sacred treasure, and it could not have been left in better hands, for Sister Petit belonged to an honourable family of Paray, and was not one to shrink at the approach of danger. She deemed it quite unnecessary to conceal the two little wooden shrines consigned to her care, one of which contained the sacred remains of the Venerable Margaret Mary Alacoque, and the second, those of Father de la Colombière.[1] When the municipal officers were making the domiciliary visits, Sister Petit showed them the two shrines, saying quite simply: "*See, here is my treasure, which I forbid you to touch!*" and her prohition was obeyed. It would take too long if we were to attempt to relate all the obstacles which for so many years stood in the way of the restoration of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial. A noble courage combined with a humble constancy were needed by those who were to bring about this work. Mother Marie Rose Carmoy and Sister Marie Thérèse Petit were, so to say, the soul of this laborious and delicate enterprise.

In 1817 several Sisters of the former Community of Paray, animated with a holy impatience to resume the exercises of the religious life, proposed to join the former Community of Moulins which was being rein-

[1] The Visitation had taken charge of the latter on the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1763.

stated at La-Charité-sur-Loire ; and they endeavoured to carry with them the little shrine containing the relics of Sister Margaret Mary. Their design was, however, discovered and the town of Paray was alarmed. Immediate recourse was had to Mgr. Fabian Sebastian Imberties, Bishop of Autun, who sent a special command to M. Noiret, curé of Paray, ordering him to apply to the Mayor and other town authorities to provide that the relics of the Venerable Margaret Mary Alacoque, as also those of Father de la Colombière, were not to be removed from Paray-le-Monial. Immediate steps were consequently taken, and Paray preserved its precious pearl, "*Margarita pretiosa.*"[1] The two shrines remained for some time in a tribune in one of the transepts of the parish church ; but fearing that they were not in safety there, the curé had them removed to his own house, where they were found after his death, September 12, 1817.

As all disquietude concerning the removal of the holy relics had by that time disappeared, they were, with ecclesiastical approbation and the consent of the town council, restored to the Sisters, who were anxiously awaiting the canonical re-establishment of their Community. Surely these brave and holy souls were better suited than any other to be the guardians of such a treasure ! On June 16, 1823, the day on which they went back to the Monastery, the remains of the Servant of God were reinstated there with feelings of holy joy, but void of any exterior pomp, for whatever might in any way have resembled public veneration, would have been liable to injure her Cause. The little shrine was not replaced in the ancient vault beneath the nuns' choir, but was kept in various places in the interior of the Monastery, according to the different indications received from Rome in view of the Beatification of her whose relics it contained. The misfortunes of the Church in France forcibly interrupted the Process of

[1] Math. XIII., 46.

Beatification, which was not resumed until some time after the Revolution.[1]

On March 30, 1824, His Holiness Leo XII signed the commission for the introduction of the Cause. According to the custom at that time, the Servant of God received the title of *Venerable*.[2] She retained this title for the space of forty years, during which time the three miracles required for her Beatification were wrought. The first was in 1828, and was in favour of Sister Marie de Sales Chareault, professed nun of the Visitation of Paray-le-Monial, who was cured of cancer in the stomach. On July 21, 1830, eve of the judicial recognition of the tomb of the Venerable Sister, Sister Marie Thérèse Petit, the faithful and devoted guardian of her relics during the dispersion of the Community, was suddenly cured of aneurism of the heart. Finally in 1841, Sister Louise Phillippine Bollani, of the Monastery of the Visitation of Venice, suffering from incurable tubercular consumption, was favoured with a complete and instantaneous cure. By a decree dated April 24, 1864, these three miracles were declared authentic. On September 18, of the same year, Pius IX pronounced Margaret Mary, *Blessed*. A few months later, in June 1865, splendid celebrations took place at Paray-le-Monial

[1] The reader will doubtless wish to know what became of the remains of Father de la Colombière which were taken to the Monastery with those of Margaret Mary. They were taken care of by the Sisters of the Visitation until 1829, when, according to a previous promise, they were given back to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, who had re-opened a house at Paray. The Jesuits were again dispersed in 1830, but one of their number, Father Debrosse, remained in Paray till 1833. Before leaving, he consigned the precious remains to the care of the Visitation, where they were again preserved until May 14, 1877, when they were finally restored to the Jesuit Fathers who had again returned to Paray.

[2] This custom was abolished by a decree promulgated by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1912. Now it is only after the publication of the decree on the heroism of their virtues or on their martyrdom that the Servants of God are officially called Venerable.

in honour of the newly beatified Sister, and then it was that her precious remains were deposited in a superb silver-gilt shrine in the chapel of the Visitation of Paray. This modest, but pious sanctuary, is the very same one which witnessed the great apparitions of the Sacred Heart. When crossing its threshold, the faithful may truly say that they are treading on holy ground, and entering the *Holy of Holies* of the New Testament. Only the Angels who surround the tabernacle could relate the marvels of grace which have been wrought on this spot, especially since the year 1873, when the great pilgrimages, which bring untold crowds to the Sacred Heart, were first inaugurated. It would be impossible to give an adequate idea of the number of conversions obtained, of souls that are consoled and encouraged, and of hearts that are enlightened and strengthened. In this sanctuary, especially, the words of the Master to His disciple have been verified : " I wish to make use of thee as a means of drawing souls to My love." [1] In 1890 Mgr. Perraud, Bishop of Autun, with a view to celebrating solemnly the second centenary of the death of this Blessed Sister, to whom he was united by bonds of relationship, ob-obtained from His Holiness Leo XIII, a Jubilee of seven weeks for Paray-le-Monial. This was not merely a triumph for Margaret Mary, it was also a source of sanctification for many souls.

How many supplications were then sent up to heaven from all parts of the world, and more especially from the numerous Monasteries of the Visitation, to obtain the Canonization of the Servant of God! It was necessary first of all to obtain two fresh miracles thoroughly authenticated, not only mere cures. Those that were chosen to be submitted to the examination of the Sacred Congregation of Rites date back to the years 1900 and 1903. In 1900 Signora Luisa-Agostina Coleschi, at Pompeii, was instan-

[1] Life and Writings II, p. 193.

taneously cured of meningo-myelitis, and in 1903 Countess Antonietta Pavesi-Astorri also obtained, through the intercession of Blessed Margaret Mary, the instantaneous cure of a painful cancer.

Numerous difficulties arose in the course of examination. More than one, doubtless, was raised by the devil, who was always opposed to the exaltation of this great Servant of God—"Humblest of the humble." But, finally, Providence foiled the wiles of the evil one, and, contrary to all expectation, brought the Cause to a satisfactory conclusion, since it was in the midst of the Great War that it was resumed, and, under the paternal protection of Benedict XV, finally triumphed over all obstacles. On January 6, 1918, the Feast of the Epiphany, the holy Father promulgated the decree approving the miracles. On March 17 of the same year—Passion Sunday—the Cause of Margaret Mary, that great lover of the Cross, was favourably concluded. The solemn decree of *Tuto* determined that the Canonization could be proceeded with: "*Tuto procedi posse ad canonizationem.*" But the great European war was still raging and circumstances were not propitious to the display accompanying the celebrations of a Canonization. A further delay was necessary.

The day destined by God from all eternity at last dawned, when, to the joy of earth as of heaven, the privileged disciple of the Heart of Jesus was to receive the aureola of the Saints. On May 13, 1920, amid imposing ceremonies, in the presence of many Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and a great concourse of the faithful of all nations, the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XV, proclaimed Margaret Mary a *Saint*. The Te Deum was entoned by His Holiness, and all the bells of Rome announced the Canonization. This took place on the Feast of the Ascension, because Providence willed that she who had always followed Jesus Christ along the path of suffering and crucifixion should be intimately associated with the glory of His triumph. *Exaltavit*

humiles! The supreme honours bestowed on Margaret Mary are the final seal affixed to the revelations of Paray-le-Monial. The Church has thus added new lustre to the devotion to the Sacred Heart. May God be praised !

A souvenir of the Canonization remains in the Vatican Basilica, viz., a large picture of the Apparition of the Sacred Heart which Benedict XV had painted by the artist Carlo Muccioli, and placed in St. Peter's above the altar which His Holiness had recently dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

The Visitation of Rome—via Salaria—celebrated the glory of the new Saint on the very evening of May 13, 1920, by a ceremony at which the élite of Rome assisted. In order to satisfy the piety of the Roman people, medals, pictures and copies of the " Life " of the Saint of Paray were liberally distributed. Moreover, in the month of April 1921, the *Postulation* had a triduum of thanksgiving celebrated in the Church of the *Gesù*, during which magnificent functions were held and the best orators preached.

At Paray-le-Monial, near the mortal remains of the Saint, a succession of festivities took place. During the first triduum, from May 13 to 16, the Community of the Visitation hastened to express its deep gratitude to God. What a joy it was to the nuns to see the privileged Sanctuary of the Apparitions invaded by pious crowds of pilgrims, eager to surround the shrine of her to whom the words *Exultabunt ossa humiliata* could so fittingly be applied ! The praises of the disciple of the Heart of Jesus were sung both within and without the Monastery. Mgr. Berthoin, Bishop of Autun, had obtained exceptional favours from the holy Father in honour of the Canonization, viz., an extraordinary Jubilee was granted to Paray-le-Monial and divided into five periods : October 8 to 24, 1920 ; April 20 to May 5, 1921 ; May 20 to June 8, 1921 ; August 1 to 15, 1921 ; October 2 to 17, 1921.

Each of these periods was honoured by the presence of Bishops, Archbishops or Cardinals, and drew vast numbers to Paray. Abundant fountains of grace seemed to well up for souls on this hallowed spot. The heroic Servant of God, who had sanctified herself there in obedience and humility, had many and eloquent panegyrists. There were magnificent processions through the town and, by a special privilege granted by the holy Father, even inside the enclosure of the Monastery, during which the Saint's shrine was several times carried in triumph. In the month of August, 1921, it was escorted by many Prelates, among whom was His Grace the Archbishop of Ptolemaïs, Mgr. Raphaël Virili. As Postulator, he had a better right than anyone to rejoice at the final success of the Cause. His Excellency Mgr. Cerretti, Archbishop of Corinth and Apostolic Nuncio at Paris, presided over the closing ceremonies of the Jubilee of the Canonization on the very day of the Feast of St. Margaret Mary—October 17, 1921. These pious solemnities will ever be remembered by those who witnessed them.

In the Monasteries of the Visitation—and elsewhere—all vied in exalting the glorious Saint of May 13, 1920. Throughout the following year, all over the Catholic world, festivities succeeded each other in her honour, or rather, in honour of the Heart of Jesus, it being impossible to separate the disciple from the Master, or to speak of her without speaking of Him.

And now, O Saint Margaret Mary, continue thy mission! Be ever the messenger of the Sacred Heart to the world! Make known Its love ever more and more! May It reign, may this adorable and infinitely merciful Heart reign! To the Heart of Jesus be praise and glory for ever and ever!

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